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THE

HISTORY

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

VOL. II.

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New-Street-Square.

THE

HISTORY

OF

CHRISTIANITY,

FROM

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

TO

THE ABOLITION OF PAGANISM

IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE.



BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ERRATA AND ADDITIONS TO VOL. II.

Page 124. line 110. for "mere" read "more."
— 140. line 13. for "is" read "was."
— 147. a note has by mistake been repeated.
— 199. line 18. for "Goths" read "Thracians."
— 224. bottom line, for "her" read "the."
— 264. line 18. dele "were;" line 19. dele "than."
— 281. line 16. for "decuvions" read "decurions."
— 322. In a very curious extract from the ancient Armenian historian Zenob, there is an account of this civil war. The following inscription commemorated the decisive battle: —

The first battle in which men bravely fought.
The leader of the warriors was Argan, the chief of the Priesthood,
Who lies here in his grave,
And with him 1038 men,
And this battle was fought for the godhead of Kisane,
And for that of Christ.

This unquestionably was the first religious war since the introduction of Christianity. It is a singular fact, that these obstinate idolaters were said to be of foreign, of Indian descent; they wore long hair. See Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, vol. i. p. 253. 378. et seqq.
Page 359. note, for "lib." read "Tib."
— 370. note, for "Constantius" read "Constantinus."

HISTORY

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER III.

CHRISTIANITY AND PAGANISM.

CHAP. III.

Relationship between Judaism and Christianity.

THE conflict of Christianity with Judaism was a civil war; that with Paganism, the invasion and conquest of a foreign territory. In the former case it was the declared design of the innovation, to perfect the established constitution on its primary principles; to expand the yet undeveloped system, according to the original views of the Divine Legislator; in the latter it contemplated the total subversion of the existing order of things, a reconstruction of the whole moral and religious being of mankind. With the Jew, the abolition of the Temple service, and the abrogation of the Mosaic Law, were indispensable to the perfect establishment of Christianity. The first was left to be accomplished by the frantic turbulence of the people, and the remorseless vengeance of Rome. Yet, after all, the Temple service maintained its more profound and indelible influence

BOOK II.

only over the Jew of Palestine; its hold upon the vast numbers which were settled in all parts of the world, was that of remote, occasional, traditionary reverence. With the foreign Jew, the service of the synagogue was his religion; and the synagogue, without any violent change, was transformed into a Christian church. The same Almighty God, to whom it was primarily dedicated, maintained his place; and the sole difference was, that he was worshipped through the mediation of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth. With the Pagan, the whole of his religious observances fell under the unsparing proscription. Every one of the countless temples and shrines, and sacred groves, and hallowed fountains, were to be desecrated by the abhorrent feelings of those who looked back with shame and contempt upon their old idolatries. Every image, from the living work of Phidias or Praxiteles, to the rude and shapeless Hermes or Terminus, was to become an unmeaning mass of wood or stone. In every city, town, or even village, there was a contest to be maintained, not merely against the general system of Polytheism, but against the local and tutelary deity of the place. Every public spectacle, every procession, every civil or military duty, was a religious ceremonial. Though later, when Christianity was in the ascendant, it might expel the deities of Paganism from some of the splendid temples, and convert them to its own use; though insensibly many of the usages of the Heathen worship crept into the more gorgeous and imposing ceremonial of

CHAP. III.

Direct opposition of Christianity to Paganism.

triumphant Christianity; though even many of the vulgar superstitions incorporated themselves with the sacred Christian associations, all this reaction was long subsequent to the permanent establishment of the new religion. At first all was rigid and uncompromising hostility; doubts were entertained by the more scrupulous, whether meat exposed to public sale in the market, but which might have formed part of a sacrifice, would not be dangerously polluting to the Christian. The Apostle, though anxious to correct this sensitive scrupulousness, touches on the point with the utmost caution and delicacy.*

The private life of the Jew was already, in part at least, fettered by the minute and almost Brahminical observances, with which the later Rabbins established their despotic authority over the mind. Still some of these usages harmonised with the spirit of Christianity; others were less inveterately rooted in the feelings of the foreign Jew. The trembling apprehension of any thing approaching to idolatry, the concentration of the heart's whole devotion upon the One Almighty God, prepared the soul for a Christian bias. The great struggle to Jewish feeling was the abandonment of circumcision, as the sign of their covenant with God. But this once over, baptism, the substituted ceremony, was perhaps already familiar to his mind; or, at least, emblematic ablutions were strictly in unison with the genius and the practice of his former religion. Some of the stricter Pharisaic distinctions

* 1 Corinth. x. 25—31.

BOOK II.

were local and limited to Palestine, as, for instance, the payment of tithe; since the Temple tribute was the only national tax imposed by his religion on the foreign Jew. Their sectarian symbols, which in Palestine were publicly displayed upon their dress, were of course less frequent in foreign countries; and though worn in secret, might be dropped and abandoned by the convert to Christianity, without exciting observation. The whole life of the Heathen, whether of the philosopher who despised, or the vulgar who were indifferent to, the essential part of the religion, was pervaded by the spirit of Polytheism. It met him in every form, in every quarter, in every act and function of every day's business; not merely in the graver offices of the state, in the civil and military acts of public men; in the senate which commenced its deliberations with sacrifice; in the camp, the centre of which was a consecrated temple: his domestic hearth was guarded by the Penates, or by the ancestral gods of his family or tribe; by land he travelled under the protection of one tutelar divinity, by sea of another; the birth, the bridal, the funeral, had each its presiding deity; the very commonest household utensils and implements were cast in mythological forms; he could scarcely drink without being reminded of making a libation to the gods; and the language itself was impregnated with constant allusions to the popular religion.

Universality of Paganism.

However, as a religion, Polytheism was undermined and shaken to the base, yet, as part of the existing order of things, its inert resistance would every where present a strong barrier against the

invasion of a foreign faith. The priesthood of an effete religion, as long as the attack is conducted under the decent disguise of philosophical inquiry, or is only aimed at the moral or the speculative part of the faith; as long as the form, of which alone they are become the ministers, is permitted to subsist, go on calmly performing the usual ceremonial: neither their feelings nor their interests are actively alive to the veiled and insidious encroachments which are made upon its power and stability. In the Roman part of the western world, the religion was an integral part of the state: the greatest men of the last days of the Republic, the Ciceros and Cæsars, the Emperors themselves, aspired to fill the pontifical offices, and discharged their duties with grave solemnity, however their declared philosophical opinions were subversive of the whole system of Polytheism. Men might disbelieve, deny, even substitute foreign superstitions for the accustomed rites of their country, provided they did not commit any overt act of hostility, or publicly endeavour to bring the ceremonial into contempt. Such acts were not only impieties, they were treason against the majesty of Rome. In the Grecian cities, on the other hand, the interests and the feelings of the magistracy and the priesthood, were less intimately connected; the former, those at least who held the higher authority, being Roman, the latter local or municipal. Though it was the province of the magistrate to protect the established religion, and it was sufficiently the same with his own, to receive

BOOK II.

his regular worship, yet the strength with which he would resist, or the jealousy with which he would resent any dangerous innovation, would depend on the degree of influence possessed by the sacerdotal body, and the pride or enthusiasm which the people might feel for their local worship. Until, then, Christianity had made such progress as to produce a visible diminution in the attendance on the Pagan worship; until the temples were comparatively deserted, and the offerings less frequent, the opposition encountered by the Christian teacher, or the danger to which he would be exposed, would materially depend on the peculiar religious circumstances of each city.*

* In a former publication the author attempted to represent the manner in which the strength of Polytheism, and its complete incorporation with the public and private life of its votaries, might present itself to the mind of a Christian teacher on his first entrance into a heathen city. The passage has been quoted in Archbishop Whately's book on Rhetoric.

"Conceive then the Apostles of Jesus Christ, the tent-maker or the fisherman, entering as strangers into one of the splendid cities of Syria, Asia Minor, or Greece. Conceive them, I mean, as unendowed with miraculous powers, having adopted their itinerant system of teaching from human motives, and for human purposes alone. As they pass along to the remote and obscure quarter, where they expect to meet with precarious hospitality among their countrymen, they survey the strength of the established religion, which it is their avowed purpose to overthrow. Every where they behold temples, on which the utmost extravagance of expenditure has been lavished by succeeding generations; idols of the most exquisite workmanship, to which, even if the religious feeling of adoration is enfeebled, the people are strongly attached by national or local vanity. They meet processions in which the idle find perpetual occupation, the young excitement, the voluptuous a continual stimulant to their passions. They behold a priesthood numerous, sometimes wealthy; nor are these alone wedded by interest to the established faith; many of the trades, like those of the makers of silver shrines at Ephesus, are pledged to the support of that to which they owe their maintenance. They pass a magnificent theatre, on the splendour and success of which the popularity of the existing authorities mainly depends; and in which the

CHAP. III.

The narrative in the Acts, as far as it proceeds, is strikingly in accordance with this state of things. The adventures of the Apostles in the different cities of Asia Minor and Greece are singularly characteristic of the population and the state of the existing Polytheism in each. It was not, till it had extended beyond the borders of Palestine, that

serious exhibitions are essentially religious, the lighter as intimately connected with the indulgence of the baser passions. They behold another public building, where even worse feelings, the cruel and the sanguinary, are pampered by the animating contests of wild beasts and of gladiators, in which they themselves may shortly play a dreadful part,

Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday!

Show and spectacle are the characteristic enjoyments of a whole people, and every show and spectacle is either sacred to the religious feelings, or incentive to the lusts of the flesh; those feelings which must be entirely eradicated, those lusts which must be brought into total subjection to the law of Christ. They encounter likewise itinerant jugglers, diviners, magicians, who impose upon the credulous to excite the contempt of the enlightened; in the first case, dangerous rivals to those who should attempt to propagate a new faith by imposture and deception; in the latter, naturally tending to prejudice the mind against all miraculous pretensions whatever: here, like Elymas, endeavouring to outdo the signs and wonders of the Apostles, thereby throwing suspicion on all asserted supernatural agency, by the frequency and clumsiness of their delusions. They meet philosophers, frequently itinerant like themselves; or teachers of new religions, priests of Isis and Serapis, who have brought into equal discredit what might otherwise have appeared a proof of philanthropy, the performing laborious journeys at the sacrifice of personal ease and comfort, for the moral and religious improvement of mankind; or at least have so accustomed the public mind to similar pretensions, as to take away every attraction from their boldness or novelty. There are also the teachers of the different mysteries, which would engross all the anxiety of the inquisitive, perhaps excite, even if they did not satisfy, the hopes of the more pure and lofty-minded. Such must have been among the obstacles which must have forced themselves on the calmer moments of the most ardent; such the overpowering difficulties of which it would be impossible to overlook the importance, or elude the force; which required no sober calculation to estimate, no laborious inquiry to discover; which met and confronted them wherever they went, and which, either in desperate presumption, or deliberate reliance on their own preternatural powers, they must have contemned and defied."—Bampton Lectures, p. 269. 273.

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Christianity came into direct collision with Paganism. The first Gentile convert, admitted into the Christian community by St. Peter, Cornelius, if not a proselyte to Judaism, approached very nearly to it. He was neither polytheist nor philosopher; he was a worshipper of One Almighty Creator, and familiar, it should seem, with the Jewish belief in angelic appearances. Even beyond the Holy Land, Christianity did not immediately attempt to address the general mass of the Pagan community; its first collisions were casual and accidental; its operations commenced in the synagogue; a separate community was not invariably formed, or, if formed, appeared to the common observation only a new assemblage for Jewish worship; to which, if Heathen proselytes gathered in more than ordinary numbers, it was but the same thing on a larger, which had excited little jealousy on a smaller scale.*

Christianity in Cyprus.

During the first journey of St. Paul, it is manifest that in Cyprus particularly, and in the towns of Asia Minor, the Jewish worship was an object of general respect: and Christianity appearing as a modification of Jewish belief, shared in that deference which had been long paid to the national religion of the Jewish people. Sergius Paulus†, the

* The extent to which Jewish proselytism had been carried, is a most intricate question. From the following passage, quoted from Seneca by St. Augustin, if *genuine*, it would seem that it had made great progress: —"Cum interim usque eo sceleratissimæ gentis consuetudo convaluit, ut per omnes terras jure recepta sit, victi victoribus leges dederunt. St. Augustin positively asserts that this sentence does not include the Christians. De Civit. Dei, vi. 11.

† Acts, xiii. 6—12.

governor of Cyprus, under the influence of the Jew Elymas, was already more than half, if not altogether alienated from the religion of Rome. Barnabas and Paul appeared before him at his own desire; and their manifest superiority over his former teacher easily transformed him from an imperfect proselyte to Judaism into a convert to Christianity.

Antioch in Pisidia.

At Antioch in Pisidia there was a large class of proselytes to Judaism, who espoused the cause of the Christian teachers, and who probably formed the more considerable part of the Gentile hearers, addressed by Paul, on his rejection by the leading Jews of that city.

Lystra.

At Lystra *, in Lycaonia, the Apostle appears for the first time, in the centre, as it were, of a Pagan population; and it is remarkable, that in this wild and inland region, we find the old barbarous religion maintaining a lively and commanding influence over the popular mind. In the more civilised and commercial parts of the Roman world, in Ephesus, in Athens, or in Rome, such extraordinary cures as that of the cripple at Lystra, might have been publicly wrought, and might have excited a wondering interest in the multitude: but it may be doubted, whether the lowest or most ignorant would have had so much faith in the old fabulous appearances of their own deities, as im-

* Acts, xiv. 6—19. There were Jews resident at Lystra, as appears by Acts, xvi. 1, 2. Timotheus was the offspring of an intermarriage between a Jewish woman and a Greek: his name is Greek.

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mediately to have imagined their actual and visible appearance in the persons of these surprising strangers. It is only in the remote and savage Lystra, where the Greek language had not predominated over the primitive barbarous dialect * (probably a branch of the Cappadocian), that the popular emotion instantly metamorphoses these public benefactors into the Jove and Mercury of their own temples. The inhabitants actually make preparation for sacrifice, and are with difficulty persuaded to consider such wonder-working men to be of the same nature with themselves. Nor is it less characteristic of the versatility of a rude people, that no sooner is the illusion dispelled, than they join with the hostile Jews in the persecution of those very men, whom their superstition, but a short time before, had raised into objects of divine worship.

In the second, and more extensive journey of St. Paul, having parted from Barnabas †, he was accompanied by Timotheus and Silas or Sylvanus, but of the Asiatic part of this journey, though it led through some countries of remarkable interest in the history of Paganism, no particulars are recorded.

Phrygia.

Phrygia, which was a kind of link between Greece and the remoter East, still at times sent out into the Western world its troops of frantic Orgiasts; and the Phrygian vied with the Isiac and Mithraic mysteries in its influence in awakening the dor-

* Jablonski, Dissertatio de Linguâ Lycaonicâ, reprinted in Valpy's edition of Stephens's Thesaurus.

† Acts, xv. 36. to xviii. 18.

mant fanaticism of the Roman world. It is probable, that, in these regions, the Apostle confined himself to the Jewish settlers and their proselytes. In Galatia, it is clear, that the converts were almost entirely of Hebrew descent. The vision, which invited the Apostle to cross from Troas to Macedonia, led him into a new region, where his countrymen, though forming flourishing communities in many of the principal towns, were not, except perhaps at Corinth, by any means so numerous as in the greater part of Asia Minor. His vessel touched at Samothrace, where the most ancient and remarkable mysteries still retained their sanctity and veneration in that holy and secluded island. At Philippi he first came into collision with those whose interests were concerned in the maintenance of the popular religion. Though these were only individuals, whose gains were at once put an end to by the progress of Christianity, the owners of the female soothsayer of Philippi were part of a numerous and active class, who subsisted on the public credulity. The proseucha, or oratory, of the Jews (the smaller place of worship, which they always established when their community was not sufficiently flourishing to maintain a synagogue), was, as usual, by the water side. The river, as always in Greece and in all southern countries, was the resort of the women of the city, partly for household purposes, partly perhaps for bathing. Many of this sex were in consequence attracted by the Jewish proseucha, and had become, if not proselytes, at least very

Galatia.

Philippi.

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favourably inclined to Judaism. Among these was Lydia, whose residence was at Thyatira, and who, from her trading in the costly purple dye, may be supposed a person of considerable wealth and influence. Having already been so far enlightened by Judaism as to worship the One God, she became an immediate convert to the Christianity of St. Paul. Perhaps the influence or the example of so many of her own sex, worked upon the mind of a female of a different character and occupation. She may have been an impostor, but more probably was a young girl of excited temperament, whose disordered imagination was employed by men of more artful character for their own sordid purposes. The enthusiasm of this "divining" damsel now took another turn. Impressed with the language and manner of Paul, she suddenly deserted her old employers, and throwing herself into the train of the Apostle, proclaimed, with the same exalted fervour, his divine mission, and the superiority of his religion. Paul, troubled with the publicity, and the continual repetition of her outcries, exorcised her in the name of Jesus Christ. Her wild excitement died away; the spirit passed from her; and her former masters found that she was no longer fit for their service. She could no longer be thrown into those paroxysms of temporary derangement, in which her disordered language was received as oracular of future events. This conversion produced a tumult throughout the city; the interests of a powerful body were at stake, for the trade of soothsaying, at this time,

was both common and lucrative. The employers of the prophetess enflamed the multitude. The Apostle and his attendants were seized, arraigned before the magistrates, as introducing an *unlawful* religion. The magistrates took part against them. They suffered the ordinary punishment of disturbers of the peace; were scourged and cast into prison. While their hymn, perhaps their evening hymn, was heard through the prison, a violent earthquake shook the whole building; the doors flew open, and the fetters, by which probably they were chained to the walls, were loosened. The affrighted jailor, who was responsible for their appearance, expected them to avail themselves of this opportunity of escape, and in his despair was about to commit suicide. His hand was arrested by the calm voice of Paul, and to his wonder he found the prisoners remaining quietly in their cells. His fears and his admiration wrought together; and the jailor of Philippi, with his whole family, embraced the Christian faith. The magistrates, when they found that Paul had the privilege of Roman citizenship, were in their turn alarmed at their hasty infringement of that sacred right, released them honourably from the prison, and were glad to prevail upon them to depart peacefully from the city. Thus, then, we have already seen Christianity in collision with Polytheism, under two of its various forms: at Lystra, as still the old poetic faith of a barbarous people, insensible to the progress made elsewhere in the human mind, and devoutly believing the wonders of their native

Contrast of Polytheism at Lystra, Philippi, and Athens.

BOOK II.

religion; in Philippi, a provincial town in a more cultivated part of Greece, but still at no high state of intellectual advancement, as connected with the vulgar arts, not of the established priesthood, but of itinerant traders in popular superstition. In Athens Paganism has a totally different character, inquiring, argumentative, sceptical, Polytheism in form, and that form embodying all that could excite the imagination of a highly polished people; in reality admitting and delighting in the freest discussion, altogether inconsistent with sincere belief in the ancient and established religion.

Thessalonica.

Passing through Amphipolis and Apollonia, Paul and his companions arrived at Thessalonica; but in this city, as well as in Berea, their chief intercourse appears to have been with the Jews. The riot by which they were expelled from Thessalonica, though blindly kept up by the disorderly populace, was instigated by Jason the chief of the Jewish community. Having left his companions, Timotheus and Silas, at Berea, Paul arrived alone at Athens.

Athens.

At Athens, the centre at once and capital of the Greek philosophy and Heathen superstition, takes place the first public and direct conflict between Christianity and Paganism. Up to this time there is no account of any one of the Apostles taking his station in the public street or market-place, and addressing the general multitude.* Their

* This appears to be intimated in the expression, Acts, xvii. 16. "His spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city, wholly given to idolatry."

place of teaching had invariably been the synagogue of their nation, or, as at Philippi, the neighbourhood of their customary place of worship. Here, however, Paul does not confine himself to the synagogue, or to the society of his countrymen and their proselytes. He takes his stand in the public market-place (probably not the Ceramicus, but the Eretriac Forum*) which, in the reign of Augustus, had begun to be more frequented, and at the top of which was the famous portico, from which the Stoics assumed their name. In Athens, the appearance of a new public teacher, instead of offending the popular feelings, was too familiar to excite astonishment, and was rather welcomed, as promising some fresh intellectual excitement. In Athens, hospitable to all religions and all opinions, the foreign and Asiatic appearance, and possibly the less polished tone and dialect of Paul, would only awaken the stronger curiosity. Though they affect at first (probably the philosophic part of his hearers), to treat him as an idle "babbler," and others (the vulgar, alarmed for the honour of their deities) supposed that he was about to introduce some new religious worship, which might endanger the supremacy of their own tutelar divinities; he is conveyed, not without respect, to a still more public and commodious place, from whence he may explain his doctrines to a numerous assembly without disturbance. On the Areopagus†, the Christian leader

Paul on the Areopagus.

* Strabo, x. 447.

† It has been supposed by some that Paul was summoned before the Court of the Areopagus, who took

BOOK. II.

takes his stand, surrounded on every side with whatever was noble, beautiful, and intellectual in the older world, temples, of which the materials were only surpassed by the architectural grace and majesty; statues, in which the ideal Anthropomorphism of the Greeks had almost elevated the popular notions of the Deity, by embodying it in human forms of such exquisite perfection; public edifices, where the civil interests of man had been discussed with the acuteness and versatility of the highest Grecian intellect, in all the purity of the inimitable Attic dialect, where oratory had obtained its highest triumphs by "wielding at will the fierce democracy;" the walks of the philosophers, who unquestionably, by elevating the human mind to an appetite for new and nobler knowledge, had prepared the way for a loftier and purer religion. It was in the midst of these elevating associations, to which the student of Grecian literature in Tarsus, the reader of Menander, and of the Greek philosophical poets, could scarcely be entirely dead or ignorant, that Paul stands forth to proclaim the lowly yet authoritative religion of Jesus of Nazareth. His audience was chiefly formed from the two prevailing sects, the Stoics and Epicureans, with the populace, the worshippers of the established religion. In his discourse, the heads of which are related by St. Luke, Paul, with singular felicity, touches on the peculiar

Speech of Paul.

cognizance of causes relating to religion. But there is no indication, in the narrative, of any of the forms of a judicial proceeding.

opinions of each class among his hearers * ; he expands the popular religion into a higher philosophy; he imbues philosophy with a profound sentiment of religion. †

It is impossible not to examine with the utmost interest the whole course of this, (if we consider its remote consequences, and suppose it the first full and public argument of Christianity against the heathen religion and philosophy,) perhaps the most extensively and permanently effective oration ever uttered by man. We may contemplate Paul as the representative of Christianity, in the presence, as it were, of the concentrated religion of Greece; and of the spirits, if we may so speak, of Socrates, and Plato, and Zeno. The opening of the apostle's speech is according to those most perfect rules of art which are but the expressions of the general sentiments of nature. It is calm, temperate, conciliatory. It is no fierce denunciation of idolatry, no contemptuous disdain of the prevalent philosophic opinions; it has nothing of the sternness of the ancient Jewish prophet, nor the taunting defiance of the later Christian polemic. "Already the religious people of Athens had, unknowingly indeed, worshipped the universal deity, for they had an altar to the Unknown

* Paulus summâ arte orationem suam ita temperat, ut modo cum vulgo contra philosophos, modo cum philosophis contra plebem, modo contra utrosque pugnet. Rosenmuller in loco.

† The art and propriety of this speech is considerably marred by the mistranslation of one word in our version, δεισιδαιμονεστέρους,—which does not imply reproof, as in the rendering "too superstitious." Conciliation, not offence, of the public feeling, especially at the opening of a speech, is the first principle of all oratory, more particularly of Christian teaching.

BOOK II.

God.* The nature, the attributes of this sublimer being, hitherto adored in ignorant and unintelligent homage, he came to unfold. This God rose far above the popular notion; he could not be confined in altar or temple, or represented by any visible image. He was the universal father of mankind, even of the earth-born Athenians, who boasted that they were of an older race than the other families of man, and coeval with the world itself. He was the fountain of life, which pervaded and sustained the universe; he had assigned their separate dwellings to the separate families of man." Up to a certain point in this higher view of the Supreme Being, the philosopher of the Garden, as well as of the Porch, might listen with wonder and admiration. It soared, indeed, high above the vulgar religion: but in the lofty and serene Deity, who disdained to dwell in the earthly temple, and needed nothing from the hand of man †, the Epicurean might almost suppose that he heard the language of his own teacher. But the next sentence, which asserted the providence of God as the active, creative energy,— as the conservative, the ruling, the ordaining principle, — annihilated at once the atomic theory, and the government of blind chance, to which Epicurus ascribed the origin and preservation of

* Of all the conjectures (for all is purely conjectural), on the contested point of the "altar to the Unknown God," the most ingenious and natural, in our opinion, is that of Eichhorn. There were, he supposes, very ancient altars, older perhaps than the art of writing, or on which the inscription had been effaced by time: on these the piety of later ages had engraven the simple words "To the Unknown God."

† Needing nothing: the coincidence with the "nihil indiga nostri" of Lucretius is curious, even if accidental.

the universe. "This high and impassive deity, who dwelt aloof in serene and majestic superiority to all want, was perceptible in some mysterious manner by man: his all-pervading providence comprehended the whole human race; man was in constant union with the Deity, as an offspring with its parent." And still the Stoic might applaud with complacent satisfaction the ardent words of the Apostle; he might approve the lofty condemnation of idolatry. "We, thus of divine descent, ought to think more nobly of our universal Father than to suppose that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art or man's device." But this divine Providence was far different from the stern and all-controlling Necessity, the inexorable Fatalism of the Stoic system. While the moral value of human action was recognised by the solemn retributive judgment to be passed on all mankind, the dignity of Stoic virtue was lowered by the general demand of repentance. The perfect man, the moral king, was deposed, as it were, and abased to the general level; he had to learn new lessons in the school of Christ; lessons of humility and conscious deficiency, the most directly opposed to the principles and the sentiments of his philosophy.

The great Christian doctrine of the resurrection closed the speech of Paul; a doctrine received with mockery, perhaps by his Epicurean hearers, with suspension of judgment, probably, by the Stoic, with whose theory of the final destruction of the world by fire, and his tenet of future retribution, it might appear in some degree to harmonise. Some, how-

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ever, became declared converts; among whom are particularly named Dionysius, a man of sufficient distinction to be a member of the famous court of the Areopagus, and a woman, named Damaris, probably of considerable rank and influence.

At Athens, all this free discussion on topics relating to the religious and moral nature of man, and involving the authority of the existing religion, passed away without disturbance. The jealous reverence for the established faith, which, conspiring with its perpetual ally, political faction, had in former times caused the death of Socrates, the exile of Stilpo, and the proscription of Diagoras the Melian, had long died away. With the loss of independence, political animosities had subsided, and the toleration of philosophical and religious indifference allowed the utmost latitude to speculative inquiry, however ultimately dangerous to the whole fabric of the national religion. Yet Polytheism still reigned in Athens in its utmost splendour: the temples were maintained with the highest pomp; the Eleusinian Mysteries, in which religion and philosophy had in some degree coalesced, attracted the noblest and the wisest of the Romans, who boasted of their initiation in these sublime secrets. Athens was thus, at once, the headquarters of Paganism, and at the same time the place where Paganism most clearly betrayed its approaching dissolution.

From Athens, the Apostle passes to Corinth. Corinth was at this time the common emporium of the eastern and western divisions of the Roman Empire. It was the Venice of the Old World, in

CHAP. III.

Corinth, A. D. 52.

whose streets the continued stream of commerce, either flowing from, or towards the great capital of the world, out of all the eastern territories, met and crossed.* The basis of the population of Corinth was Roman, of very recent settlement; but colonists from all quarters had taken up their permanent residence in a place so admirably adapted for mercantile purposes. In no part of the Roman empire were both the inhabitants and the travellers through the city so various and mingled; no where, therefore, would a new religion, at the same time spread with so much rapidity, and send out the ramifications of its influence with so much success; and at the same time excite so little observation amid the stir of business and the perpetual influx and afflux of strangers, or be less exposed to jealous opposition. Even the priesthood, newly settled, like the rest of the colony, could command no ancient reverence; and in the perpetual mingling and confusion of all dresses and dialects, no doubt there was the same concourse of religious itinerants of every description.† At

* After its destruction by Mummius, Corinth was restored, beautified, and colonised by Julius Cæsar.—Strabo, viii. 381. For its history, wealth, and commercial situation, Diod. Sic. Fragm. The profligacy of Corinthian manners was likewise proverbial: — πόλιν οἰκεῖτε τῶν οὐσῶν τε καὶ γεγενημένων ἐπαφροδιτοτάτην. Dio. Chrysost. Orat. 37. v. ii. p. 110.

† Corinth was a favourite resort of the Sophists (Aristid. Isthm. Athenæus, l. xiii.), and in an oration of Dio Chrysostom there is a lively and graphic description of what may be called one of the fairs of antiquity, the Isthmian games, which happily illustrates the general appearance of society. Among the rest, the Cynic philosopher, Diogenes, appears, and endeavours to attract an audience among the vast and idle multitude. He complains, however, "that if he were a travelling dentist or an oculist, or had any infallible specific for the spleen or the gout, all who were afflicted with such diseases would have thronged around him; but as he only professed to cure mankind of vice,

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Corinth, therefore, but for the hostility of his countrymen, the Christian Apostle might, even longer than the eighteen months which he passed in that city, have preserved his peaceful course. The separation which at once took place between the Jewish and the Christian communities in Corinth—the secession of Paul from the synagogue into a neighbouring house, — might have allayed even this intestine ferment, had not the progress of Christianity, and the open adoption of the new faith by one of the chiefs of the synagogue, reawakened that fierce animosity which had already caused the expulsion of both parties from Rome, and the seeds of which no doubt rankled in the hearts of many. Here, therefore, for the first time, Christianity was brought under the cognisance of a higher authority than the municipal magistrate of one of the Macedonian cities. The contemptuous dismissal of the cause by the Proconsul of Achaia, as beneath the majesty of the Roman tribunal; his re-

ignorance, and profligacy, no one troubled himself to seek a remedy for those less grievous maladies." "And there was around the Temple of Neptune a crowd of miserable Sophists, shouting and abusing one another; and of their so called disciples, fighting with each other; and many authors reading their works, to which nobody paid any attention; and many poets, chaunting their poems, with others praising them; and many jugglers, showing off their tricks; and many prodigy-mongers noting down their wonders; and a thousand rhetoricians perplexing causes; and not a few shopkeepers retailing their wares wherever they could find a customer. And presently some approached the philosopher, — not indeed the Corinthians; for as they saw him every day in Corinth, they did not expect to derive any advantage from hearing him,— but those that drew near him were strangers, each of whom having listened a short time, and asked a few questions, made his retreat, from fear of his rebukes. Dio. Chrys. Orat. viii.

CHAP. III.

Gallio, A. D. 53.

fusal to interfere, when some of the populace, with whom the Christians were apparently the favoured party, on the repulse of the accusing Jews from the seat of justice, fell upon one of them, named Sosthenes, and maltreated him with considerable violence, shows how little even the most enlightened men yet comprehended the real nature of the new religion. The affair was openly treated as an unimportant sectarian dispute about the national faith of the Jews. The mild * and popular character of Gallio, his connection with his brother Seneca †, in whose philosophic writings the morality of Heathenism had taken a higher tone than it ever assumes, unless perhaps, subsequently, in the works of Marcus Antoninus, excite regret that the religion of Christ was not brought under his observation in a manner more likely to conciliate his attention. The result of this trial was the peaceful establishment of Christianity in Corinth, where, though secure from the violence of the Jews, it was however constantly exposed, by its situation, to the intrusion of new comers, with different modifications of Christian opinions. This, therefore, was the first Christian community which was rent into parties, and in which the authority

* Nemo mortalium uni tam dulcis est quam hic omnibus. Senec. Nat. Quæst. 4. Præf. Hoc plusquam Senecam dedisse mundo. Et dulcem generasse Gallionem. Stat. Sylv. ii. 7. Compare Dion. Cass. lx.

† Among the later forgeries was a correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul: and many Christian writers, as unacquainted with the history of their own religion as with the state of the heathen mind, have been anxious to trace all that is striking and beautiful in the writings of the Stoic to Christian influence.

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of the Apostle was perpetually wanting to correct opinions not purely Jewish in their origin.

Thus eventful was the second journey of Paul: over so wide a circuit had Christianity already been disseminated, almost entirely by his personal exertions. In many of the most flourishing and populous cities of Greece communities were formed, which were continually enlarging their sphere.

The third journey*, starting from the head-quarters of Christianity, Antioch, led Paul again through the same regions of Asia, Galatia, and Phrygia. But now, instead of crossing over into Macedonia, he proceeded along the west of Asia Minor, to the important city of Ephesus. Ephesus†, at this time, may be considered the capital, the chief mercantile city, of Asia Minor. It was inhabited by a mingled population; and, probably, united, more than any city in the East, Grecian and Asiatic habits, manners, and superstitions.‡ Its celebrated temple was one of the most splendid models of Grecian architecture; the image of the goddess retained the symbolic form of the old Eastern nature worship. It was one of the great schools of magic; the Ephesian amulets, or talismans§, were in high request. Polytheism had thus effected an amicable union of Grecian art with Asiatic mysticism and magical superstition: the vender of the silver shrines, which represented the great Temple, one of the wonders of the world, vied

Ephesus, A. D. 54.

* Acts, xviii. 23. to xxi. 3.

† Rosenmuller, das alte und neue Morgenland, 6—50.

‡ Compare Matter, Hist. du Gnosticisme, i. 137.

§ Εφεσία γράμματα.

with the trader in charms and in all the appurtenances of witchcraft. Great numbers of Jews had long inhabited the chief cities of Asia Minor; many had attained to opulence, and were of great mercantile importance. Augustus had issued a general rescript to the cities of Asia Minor for the protection of the Jews, securing to them the freedom of religious worship; legalising the transmission of the Temple tribute to Jerusalem by their own appointed receivers; and making the plunder of their synagogues sacrilege. * Two later edicts of Agrippa and Julius Antonius, proconsuls, particularly addressed to the magistracy of Ephesus, acknowledged and confirmed the imperial decree. From this period, nothing can yet have occurred to lessen their growing prosperity, or to lower them in the estimation of their Gentile neighbours. Among the numerous Jews in this great city, Paul found some, who having been in Judæa during the teaching of John the Baptist, had embraced his opinions, and received baptism, either at his hands or from his disciples, but appear not only not to have visited the mother country, but to have kept up so little connection with it, as to be almost, if not entirely, ignorant of the promulgation of Christianity. The most eminent of them, Apollos, had left the city for Corinth, where meeting with St. Paul's companions, the Roman Jews, Priscilla and Aquila, he had embraced Christianity, and being a man of eloquence, immediately took

Disciples of John the Baptist.

* Ιεροσυλια, Joseph. Ant. xvi. 6. Krebs Decreta Romanorum pro Judæis. Lipsiæ, 1778.

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such a lead in the community, as to be set up by one of the conflicting parties as a kind of rival of the Apostle. The rest of this sect in Ephesus willingly listened to the teaching of Paul: to the number of twelve, they "received the Holy Ghost," and thus became the nucleus of a new Christian community in Ephesus. The followers of John the Baptist, no doubt, conformed in all respects with the customary worship of their countrymen: their peculiar opinions were superinduced, as it were, upon their Judaism; they were still regular members of the synagogue. In the synagogue therefore Paul commenced his labours, the success of which was so great as evidently to excite the hostility of the leading Jews: hence, here likewise, a complete separation took place; the Apostle obtained possession of a school belonging to a person named Tyrannus, most likely a Grecian sophist, and the Christian church stood alone, as a distinct and independent place of divine worship.

Paul continued to reside in Ephesus two years, during which the rapid extension of Christianity was accelerated by many wonderful cures. In Ephesus, such cures were likely to be sought with avidity; but in this centre of magical superstition would by no means command belief in the divine mission of the worker of miracles; Jews, as well as Heathens, admitted the unlimited power of supernatural agencies, and vied with each other in the success of their rival enchantments. The question then would arise, by what more than usually potent charm, or mysterious power, such extraordinary works were

Ephesian magic.

wrought. The followers of both religions had implicit faith in the magic influence of certain names. With the Jews, this belief was moulded up with their most sacred traditions. It was by the holy Tetra Grammaton *, the Sem-ham-phorash, according to the Alexandrian historian of the Jews, that Moses and their gifted ancestors wrought all the wonders of their early history. Pharaoh trembled before it, and the plagues of Egypt had been obedient to the utterance of the awful monosyllable, the ineffable name of the Deity. Cabbalism, which assigned at first sanctity, and afterwards power over the intermediate spirits of good and evil, to certain combinations of letters and numbers, though not yet cultivated to its height, existed, no doubt, in its earlier elements, among the Jews of this period. Upon this principle, some of the Jews who practised exorcism attributed all these prodigies of St. Paul to some secret power possessed by the name of Jesus. Among these were some men of high rank, the sons of one of the high priests, named Sceva. They seem to have believed in the superstition by which they ruled the minds of others, and supposed that the talismanic influence, which probably depended on cabbalistic art, was inseparably connected with the pronunciation of this mystic name. Those whom this science or this trade of exorcism (according as it was prac-

Jewish exorcists.

* Artapanus apud Euseb. Præp. Evangel. viii. 28. Compare Clemens. Alex. Strom. v. p. 562. It is curious enough that the constant repetition of the mysterious name of the Deity, Oum, should be the most acceptable act of devotion among the Indians, among the Jews the most awful and inexpiable impiety.

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tised by the credulous or the crafty) employed for their purposes, were those unhappy beings of disordered imagination, possessed, according to the belief of the times, by evil spirits. One of these, on whom they were trying this experiment, had probably before been strongly impressed with the teaching of Paul, and the religion which he preached; and irritated by the interference of persons whom he might know to be hostile to the Christian party, assaulted them with great violence, and drove them naked and wounded out of the house.*

This extraordinary event was not only fatal to the pretensions of the Jewish exorcists, but at once seemed to put to shame all who believed and who practised magical arts, and the manufacturers of spells and talismans. Multitudes came forward, and voluntarily gave up, to be burned, not only all their store of amulets, but even the books which contained the magical formularies. Their value, as probably they were rated and estimated at a high price, amounted to 50,000 pieces of silver, most likely, Attic drachms, or Roman silver denarii, a coin very current in Asia Minor, and worth about $7\frac{3}{4}d.$ of our money. The sum would thus make something more than 1600*l.*

These superstitions, however, though domiciliated at Ephesus, were foreign; and, perhaps, according to the Roman provincial regulations, unlawful. Yet, even the established religion, at least some of those dependent upon it for their

* It is not improbable that they may have taken off their ordinary dress, for the purpose of performing their incantation with greater solemnity.

subsistence, began to tremble at the rapid increase of the new faith. A collision now, for the first time, took place with the interests of that numerous class who were directly connected with the support of the reigning Polytheism. The Temple of Ephesus, as one of the wonders of the world, was constantly visited by strangers; a few, perhaps, from religion, many from curiosity or admiration of the unrivalled architecture; at all events, by the greater number of those who were always passing, accidentally, or with mercantile views, through one of the most celebrated marts of the East. There was a common article of trade, a model or shrine of silver representing the temple, which was preserved as a memorial, or, perhaps, as endowed with some sacred and talismanic power. The sale of these works gradually fell off, and the artisans, at the instigation of a certain Demetrius, raised a violent popular tumult, and spread the exciting watchword that the worship of Diana was in danger. The whole city rung with the repeated outcries, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Two of Paul's companions were seized and dragged into the public theatre, the place where in many cities the public business was transacted. Paul was eager to address the multitude, but was restrained by the prudence of his friends, among whom were some of the most eminent men of the province, the Asiarchs.* The

Demetrius, the maker of silver shrines, A. D. 57.

* This office appears to have been a wreck of the ancient federal constitution of the Asiatic cities. The Asiarchs were elective, by certain cities, and represented the general league or confederation. They

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Jews appear to have been implicated in the insurrection; and, probably, to exculpate themselves, and disclaim all connection with the Christians, they put forward a certain Alexander, a man of eloquence and authority. The appearance of Alexander seems not to have produced the effect that they intended: as a Jew, he was considered hostile to the Polytheistic worship; his voice was drowned by the turbulence, and for two hours nothing could be heard in the assembly but the reiterated clamour, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." The conduct of the magistrates seems to indicate that they were acting against a part of the community, in whose favour the imperial edicts were still in force. Either they did not yet clearly distinguish between the Jews and Christians, or supposed that the latter, as originally Jews, were under the protection of the same rescripts. Expressing the utmost reverence for the established religion of Diana, they recommend moderation; exculpate the accused from the charge of intentional insult, either against the temple or the religion of the city; require that the cause should be heard in a legal form; and, finally, urge the danger which the city incurred of being punished for the breach of the public peace by the higher authorities, — the proconsular governor of Asia. The tumult was allayed; but Paul seems to have thought it prudent to withdraw from the excited

possessed the supreme sacerdotal authority; regulated and presided in the theatric exhibitions. Their pontifical character renders it more remarkable that they should have been favourably disposed towards Paul.

city, and to pursue his former line of travel into Macedonia and Greece. CHAP. III.

From Ephesus, accordingly, we trace his course through Macedonia to Corinth. Great changes had probably taken place in this community. The exiles from Rome, when the first violence of the edict of Claudius had passed away, both Jews and Christians, quietly stole back to their usual residences in the metropolis. In writing his epistle to the Roman Christians from this place, Paul seems to intimate both that the religion was again peaceably and firmly established in Rome (it counted some of the imperial household among its converts); and, likewise, that he was addressing many individuals with whom he was personally acquainted. As then, it is quite clear, from the early history, that he had not himself travelled so far as Italy, Corinth seems the only place where he can have formed these connections.

His return led him, from fear of his hostile countrymen, back through Macedonia to Troas; thence, taking ship at Assos, he visited the principal islands of the Ægean Mitylene, Chios, and Samos; landed at Miletus, where he had an interview with the heads of the Ephesian community; thence, by sea, touching at Coos, Rhodes, and A. D. 58. Patara, to Tyre. Few incidents occur during this long voyage: the solemn and affecting parting from the Ephesian Christians, who came to meet him at Miletus, implies a profound sense of the dangers which awaited him on his return to Palestine. The events which occurred during his

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journey, and his residence in Jerusalem, have been already related. This last collision with his native Judaism, and his imprisonment, occupy between two and three years.*

A. D. 61.

The next place in which the Apostle surveyed the strength, and encountered the hostility of Paganism was in the metropolis of the world. Released from his imprisonment at Cæsarea, the Christian Apostle was sent to answer for his conduct in Jerusalem before the imperial tribunal, to which, as a Roman citizen, he had claimed his right of appeal. His voyage is singularly descriptive of the precarious navigation of the Mediterranean at that time; and it is curious that in the wild island of Melita, the Apostle having been looked upon as an atrocious criminal, because a viper had fastened upon his hand; when he shook the reptile off, without having received any injury, was admired as a god. In the barbarous Melita, as in the barbarous Lystra, the belief in gods under the human form had not yet given place to the incredulous spirit of the age. He arrives, at length, at the port in Italy, where voyagers from Syria or Egypt usually disembarked, Puteoli. There appear to have been Christians in that town, who received Paul, and with whom he resided for seven days. Many of the Roman Christians, apprised of his arrival, went out to meet him as far as the village of Appii Forum, or a place called the Three Taverns. But it is remarkable that so complete by this time was the separation

* For the period between the year 58 and 61, see the last chapter.

between the Jewish and Christian communities, that the former had no intelligence of his arrival, and what is more singular, knew nothing whatever of his case.* Possibly the usual correspondence with Jerusalem had been interrupted at the time of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, and had not been re-established with its former regularity; or, as is more probable, the persecution of Paul being a party and Sadducaic measure, was neither avowed nor supported by the great body of the nation. Those who had visited, and returned from, Jerusalem, being chiefly of the Pharisaic or more religious party, were either ignorant or imperfectly informed of the extraordinary adventures of Paul in their native city: and two years had elapsed during his confinement at Cæsarea. Though still in form a prisoner, Paul enjoyed almost perfect freedom, and his first step was a general appeal to the whole community of the Jews then resident in Rome. To them he explained the cause of his arrival. It was not uncommon in disputes between two parties in Jerusalem, that both should be summoned or sent at once by the governor, especially if, like Paul, they demanded it as a right, to plead their cause before the imperial courts. More than once the High Priest himself had been reduced to the degrading situation of a criminal before a higher tribunal; and there are several instances in which all the arts of court intrigue were employed to obtain a decision on some question of Jewish politics. Paul, while he acknowledges that his conflict with

* Acts, xxviii. 21.

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his countrymen related to his belief in Christ, as the Messiah, disclaims all intention of arraigning the ruling authorities for their injustice: he had no charge to advance against the nation. The Jews, in general, seem to have been inclined to hear from so high an authority the real doctrines of the Gospel. They assembled for that purpose at the house in which the Apostle was confined; and, as usual, some were favourably disposed to the Christianity of Paul, others rejected it with the most confirmed obduracy.

A. D. 63. St. Paul leaves Rome.

But, at this instant, we pass at once from the firm and solid ground of authentic and credible history, upon the quaking and insecure footing of legendary tradition. A few scattered notices of the personal history of Paul may be gathered from the later epistles; but the last fact which we receive from the undoubted authority of the writer of the Acts is, that two years passed before the Apostle left Rome.* To what examination he was subjected, in what manner his release was obtained, all is obscure, or rather without one ray of light. But to the success of Paul in Rome, and to the rapid progress of Christianity during these two eventful years, we have gloomy and melancholy evidence. The next year after his departure is darkly noted in the annals of Rome as the era of that fatal fire which enveloped in ruin all the ancient grandeur of the Eternal City; — in those of Christianity, as the

* Whatever might be the reason for the abrupt termination of the book of the Acts, which could neither be the death of the author, for he probably survived St. Paul, nor his total separation from him, for he was with him towards the close of his career (2 Tim. iv. 11.), the expression in the last verse but one of the Acts limits the residence of St. Paul in Rome, at that time, to two years.

CHAP. III.

A. D. 64. Burning of Rome.

epoch of the first heathen persecution. This event throws considerable light on the state of the Christian church at Rome. No secret or very inconsiderable community would have attracted the notice, or satisfied the blood-thirsty cruelty of Nero. The people would not have consented to receive as atoning victims for the dreadful disaster of the great conflagration, nor would the reckless tyranny of the emperor have condescended to select them as sacrificial offerings to appease the popular fury, unless they had been numerous, far above contempt, and already looked upon with a jealous eye. Nor is it less clear, that even to the blind discernment of popular indignation and imperial cruelty, the Christians were by this time distinguished from the Jews. They were no longer a mere sect of the parent nation, but a separate, a marked, and peculiar people, known by their distinctive usages, and incorporating many of Gentile descent into their original Jewish community.

Though at first there appears something unaccountable in this proscription of a harmless and unobtrusive sect, against whom the worst charge, at last, was the introduction of a new and peaceful form of worshipping one Deity, a privilege which the Jew had always enjoyed without molestation; yet the process by which the public mind was led to this outburst of fury, and the manner in which it was directed against the Christians, is clearly indicated by the historian.* After the first

* Mox petita diis piacula, aditique Sibyllæ libri, ex quibus supplicatum Vulcano et Cereri Proserpinæque, ac propitiata Juno per

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consternation and distress, an access of awe-struck superstition seized on the popular mind. Great public calamities can never be referred to obvious or accidental causes. The trembling people had recourse to religious rites, endeavoured to ascertain by what offended deities this dreadful judgment had been inflicted, and sought for victims to appease their yet perhaps unmitigated gods.* But when superstition has once found out victims, to whose guilt or impiety it may ascribe the divine anger, human revenge mingles itself up with the relentless determination to propitiate offended Heaven, and contributes still more to blind the judgment and exasperate the passions. The other foreign religions, at which the native deities might take offence, had been long domiciliated in Rome. Christianity was the newest, perhaps was making the most alarming progress: it was no national religion; it was disclaimed with eager animosity by the Jews, among whom it originated; its principles and practices were obscure and unintelligible; and that obscurity the excited imagination of the hostile people might fill up with the darkest and most monstrous forms.

Probable causes which implicated the Christians with this event.

We have sometimes thought it possible that incautious or misinterpreted expressions of the Christians themselves might have attracted the blind resentment of the people. The minds of the Christians

matronas, primùm in Capitolio, deinde apud proximum mare, &c. Tac. Ann. xv. 44.

* Sed non ope humanâ, non largitionibus principis, aut *deûm* placamentis decedebat infamia, quin jussum incendium crederetur.

were constantly occupied with the terrific images of the final coming of the Lord to judgment in fire; the conflagration of the world was the expected consummation, which they devoutly supposed to be instantly at hand. When, therefore, they saw the great metropolis of the world, the city of pride, of sensuality, of idolatry, of bloodshed, blazing like a fiery furnace before their eyes,—the Babylon of the West wrapped in one vast sheet of destroying flame,—the more fanatical—the *Jewish* part of the community *—may have looked on with something of fierce hope, and eager anticipation; expressions almost triumphant may have burst from unguarded lips. They may have attributed the ruin to the righteous vengeance of the Lord; it may have seemed the opening of that kingdom which was to commence with the discomfiture, the desolation, of heathenism, and to conclude with the establishment of the millennial kingdom of Christ. Some of these, in the first instance, apprehended and examined, may have made acknowledgments before a passionate and astonished tribunal, which would lead to the conclusion that, in the hour of general destruction, they had some trust, some security, denied to the rest of mankind; and this exemption from common misery, if it would not mark them out in some dark manner†, as the authors of the conflagration, at all events would

* Some deep and permanent cause of hatred against the Christians, it may almost seem, as connected with this disaster, can alone account for the strong expressions of Tacitus, writing so many years after:—Sontes et novissima exempla meritos.

† Haud perinde in crimine incendii quam odio generis humani convicti sunt.

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convict them of that hatred of the human race so often advanced against the Jews.

Inventive cruelty sought out new ways of torturing these victims of popular hatred and imperial injustice. The calm and serene patience with which they were armed by their religion against the most excruciating sufferings, may have irritated still further their ruthless persecutors. The sowing up men in the skins of beasts, and setting dogs to tear them to pieces, may find precedent in the annals of human barbarity *; but the covering them over with a kind of dress smeared with wax, pitch, or other combustible matter, with a stake under the chin, to keep them upright, and then placing them to be slowly consumed, like torches in the public gardens of popular amusement,—this seems to have been an invention of the time; and, from the manner in which it is mentioned by the Roman writers, as the most horrible torture known, appears to have made a profound impression on the general mind. Even a people habituated to gladiatorial shows, and to the horrible scenes of wholesale execution which were of daily occurrence during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero, must yet have been in an unusual state of exasperated excitement to endure, or rather to

* Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis obtecti, laniatu canum interirent; aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque ubi defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Tac. Ann. xv. 54. Juvenal calls this "tunica molesta," viii. 235.

tædâ lucebis in illâ
Qua stantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant
Et latum mediâ sulcum deducit arenâ.—i. 155

Illam tunicam alimentis ignium illitam et intextam. — Senec. Epist. xix. It was probably thought appropriate to consume with slow fire the authors of the conflagration.

take pleasure, in the sight of these unparalleled barbarities. Thus, the gentle, the peaceful religion of Christ, was welcomed upon earth by new applications of man's inventive faculties, to inflict suffering, and to satiate revenge.*

The Apostle was, no doubt, absent from Rome at the commencement, and during the whole, of this persecution. His course is dimly descried by the hints scattered through his later epistles. It is probable that he travelled into Spain. The assertion of Irenæus, that he penetrated to the extreme West† coincides with his intention of visiting that province declared at an earlier period. As it is difficult to assign to any other part of his life the establishment of Christianity in Crete, it may be permitted to suppose, that from Spain his course lay eastward, not improbably with the design of revisiting Jerusalem. That he entertained this design, there appears some evidence; none, however, that he accomplished it.‡ The state of

* Gibbon's extraordinary "conjecture" that the Christians in Rome were confounded with the Galileans, the fanatical followers of Judas the Gaulonite, is most improbable. The sect of Judas was not known beyond the precincts of Palestine. The insinuation that the Jews may have escaped the proscription, through the interest of the beautiful Poppea and the favourite Jewish player Aliturus, though not very likely, is more in character with the times.

† The visit of St. Paul to Britain, in our opinion, is a fiction of religious national vanity. It has few or no advocates except English ecclesiastical antiquarians. In fact, the state of the island, in which the precarious sovereignty of Rome was still fiercely contested by the native barbarians, seems to be entirely forgotten. Civilisation had made little progress in Britain till the conquest of Agricola. Up to that time, it was occupied only by the invading legionaries, fully employed in extending and guarding their conquests, and our wild ancestors with their stern Druidical hierarchy. From which class were the Apostle's hearers or converts? My friend Dr. Cardwell, in a recent essay on this subject, concurs with this opinion.

‡ This is inferred from Hebr. xiii. 23. This inference, however,

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Judæa, in which Roman oppression had now begun, under Albinus, if not under Florus *, to grow to an intolerable height; the spirit of indignant resistance which was fermenting in the mind of the people, might either operate to deter or to induce the Apostle to undertake the journey. On the one hand, if the Jews should renew their implacable hostility, the Christians, now having become odious to the Roman government, could expect no protection; the rapacious tyranny of the new rulers would seize every occasion of including the Christian community under the grinding and vexatious system of persecution: and such occasion would be furnished by any tumult in which they might be implicated. On the other hand, the popular mind among the Jews being absorbed by stronger interests, engrossed by passions even more powerful than hatred of Christianity, the Apostle might have entered the city unnoticed, and remained concealed among his Christian friends; particularly as the frequent change in the ruling authorities, and the perpetual deposal of the High Priest, during the long interval of his absence, may have stripped his leading adversaries of their authority.

Be this as it may, there are manifest vestiges of his having visited many cities of Asia Minor —

assumes several points. In the first place, that Paul is the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. To this opinion, though by no means certain, we strongly incline. But it does not follow that Paul fulfilled his intention; and even the intention was conditional, and dependent on the speedy arrival of Timothy, which may or may not have taken place.

* Florus succeeded Albinus, A. D. 64.

Ephesus, Colossæ *, Miletus †, Troas ‡; that he passed a winter at Nicopolis, in Epirus. § From hence he may have descended to Corinth ‖, and from Corinth, probable reasons may be assigned for his return to Rome. In all these cities, and, doubtless, in many others, where we have no record of the first promulgation of the religion, the Christians formed regular and organised communities. Constant intercourse seems to have been maintained throughout the whole confederacy. Besides the Apostles, other persons seem to have been constantly travelling about, some entirely devoted to the dissemination of the religion, others uniting it with their own secular pursuits. Onesiphorus ¶, it may be supposed, a wealthy merchant, resident at Ephesus, being in Rome at the time of Paul's imprisonment, laboured to alleviate the irksomeness of his confinement. Paul had constantly one, sometimes many, companions in his journeys. Some of these he seems to have established, as Titus, in Crete, to preside over the young communities; others were left behind for a time to superintend the interests of the religion; others, as Luke, the author of the Acts, were in more regular attendance upon him, and appear to have been only occasionally separated by accidental circumstances. But, if we may judge from the authentic records of the New Testament, the whole Christianity of the West

* Philem. 22.
† 2 Tim. iv. 20.
‡ 2 Tim. iv. 13. Compare Paley, *Horæ Paulinæ.*
§ Titus, iii. 12.
‖ 2 Tim. iv. 20.
¶ 2 Tim. i. 16. 18.

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emanated from Paul alone. The indefatigable activity of this one man had planted Christian colonies, each of which became the centre of a new moral civilisation, from the borders of Syria, as far as Spain, and to the city of Rome.

A. D. 66.

Tradition assigns to the last year of Nero the martyrdom both of St. Peter and St. Paul. That of the former rests altogether on unauthoritative testimony; that of the latter is rendered highly probable, from the authentic record of the second Epistle to Timothy. This letter was written by the author when in custody at Rome *, apparently under more rigorous confinement than during his first imprisonment; not looking forward to his release †, but with steadfast presentiment of his approaching violent death. It contains allusions to his recent journey in Asia Minor and Greece. He had already undergone a first examination ‡, and the danger was so great, that he had been deserted by some of his most attached followers, particularly by Demas. If conjecture be admitted, the preparations for the reception of Nero at Corinth, during the celebration of the Isthmian games, may have caused well-grounded apprehensions to the Christian community in that city. Paul might have thought it prudent to withdraw from Corinth, whither his last journey had brought him, and might seize the opportunity of the emperor's absence, to visit and restore the persecuted commu-

* All the names of the church who unite in the salutation, iv. 21., are Roman.

† 2 Tim. iv. 5, 6, 7.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 12. 16. Rosenmuller however (in loc.) understands this of the examination during his first trial.

nity at Rome. During the absence of Nero, the government of Rome and of Italy was entrusted to the freed-slave Helius, a fit representative of the absent tyrant. He had full power of life and death, even over the senatorial order. The world, says Dion, was enslaved at once to two autocrats, Helius and Nero. Thus Paul may have found another Nero in the hostile capital; and the general tradition, that he was put to death, not by order of the emperor, but of the governor of the city, coincides with this state of things.

The fame of St. Peter, from whom she claims the supremacy of the Christian world, has eclipsed that of St. Paul in the Eternal City. The most splendid temple which has been erected by Christian zeal, to rival or surpass the proudest edifices of heathen magnificence, bears the name of that apostle, while that of St. Paul rises in a remote and unwholesome suburb. Studious to avoid, if possible, the treacherous and slippery ground of polemic controversy, we must be permitted to express our surprise that in no part of the authentic scripture occurs the slightest allusion to the personal history of St. Peter, as connected with the western churches. At all events, the conversion of the Gentile world was the acknowledged province of St. Paul. In that partition treaty, in which these two moral invaders divided the yet unconquered world, the more civilised province of Greek and Roman heathenism was assigned to him who was emphatically called the Apostle of the Gentiles, while the Jewish population fell under the particular care of the Galilean Peter. For the

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operations of the latter, no part of the world, exclusive of Palestine, which seems to have been left to James the Just, would afford such ample scope for success as Babylonia and the Asiatic provinces, to which the Epistles of Peter are addressed. His own writings distinctly show that he was connected by some intimate tie with these communities; and, as it appears, that Galatia was a stronghold of Judaical Christianity, it is probable that the greater part of those converts were originally Jews or Asiatics, whom Judaism had already prepared for the reception of Christianity. Where Judaism thus widely prevailed, was the appropriate province of the Apostle of the circumcision. While then those, whose severe historical criticism is content with nothing less than contemporary evidence, or, at least, probable inferences from such records, will question, at least, the permanent establishment of Peter in the imperial city, those who admit the authority of tradition will adhere to, and may, indeed, make a strong case in favour of St. Peter's residence*; or his martyrdom at Rome.†

* The authorities are Irenæus, Dionysius of Corinth apud Eusebium, and Epiphanius.

† Pearson in his Opera Posthuma, Diss. de serie et successione Romæ. Episcop. supposes Peter to have been in Rome. Compare Townson on the Gospels. Diss. 5. sect. v. Barrow, (Treatise of the Pope's Supremacy,) will not "avow" the opinion of those who argue him never to have been at Rome, vol. vi. p. 139. Oxford ed. 1818. Lightfoot, whose profound knowledge of every thing relating to the Jewish nation entitles his opinions to respect, observes, in confirmation of his assertion, that Peter lived and died in Chaldea,—quam absurdum est statuere, ministrum præcipuum circumcisionis sedem suam figere in metropoli preputiatorum, Româ. Lightfoot's Works, 8vo. edit. x. 392.

If, then, with Barrow I may "bear some civil respect to ancient testimonies and traditions" (loc. cit.), the strong bias of my own mind is to the following solution

The spent wave of the Neronian persecution * may have recovered sufficient force to sweep away those who were employed in reconstructing the shattered edifice of Christianity in Rome. The return of an individual, however personally obscure, yet connected with a sect so recently pro-

of this problem. With Lightfoot, I believe, that Babylonia was the scene of St. Peter's labours. But I am likewise confident that in Rome, as in Corinth, there were two communities,—a Petrine and a Pauline,—a Judaising and an Hellenising church. The origin of the two communities in the doctrines attributed to the two apostles, may have been gradually transmuted into the foundation first of each community, then generally of the church of Rome, by the two apostles. All the difficulties in the arrangement of the succession to the episcopal see of Rome vanish, if we suppose two cotemporary lines. Here, as elsewhere, the Judaising church either expired or was absorbed in the Pauline community.

The passage in the Corinthians by no means necessarily implies the personal presence of Peter in that city. There was a party there, no doubt a judaising one, which professed to preach the pure doctrine of "Cephas," in opposition to that of Paul, and who called themselves, therefore, "of Cephas."

Dum primos ecclesiæ Romanæ fundatores quæro occurrit illud. Acts, ii. 10. Οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι. Lightfoot's Works, 8vo. edit. x. 392.

* As to the extent of the Neronian persecution, whether it was general, or confined to the city of Rome, I agree with Mosheim that only one valid argument is usually advanced on either side. On the one hand, that of Dodwell, that the Christians being persecuted not on account of their religion, but on the charge of incendiarism, that charge could not have been brought against those who lived beyond the precincts of the city. Though as to this point, it is to be feared that many an honest Protestant would have considered the real crime of the gunpowder plot, or the imputed guilt of the fire of London, ample justification for a general persecution of the Roman Catholics. On the other hand, is alleged the authority of Tertullian, who refers, in a public apology to the *laws* of Nero and Domitian against the Christians, an expression too distinct to pass for rhetoric, even in that passionate writer, though he may have magnified temporary edicts into general laws. The Spanish inscription not only wants confirmation, but even evidence that it ever existed. There is however a point of some importance in favour of the first opinion. Paul appears to have travelled about through a great part of the Roman empire during this interval, yet we have no intimation of his being in more than ordinary personal danger. It was not till his return to Rome that he was again apprehended, and at length suffered martyrdom.

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scribed, both by popular odium and public authority, would scarcely escape the vigilant police of the metropolis. One individual is named, Alexander, the coppersmith, whose seemingly personal hostility had caused or increased the danger in which Paul considered himself during his second imprisonment. He may have been the original informer, who betrayed his being in Rome, or his intimate alliance with the Christians; or, he may have appeared as evidence against him during his examination. Though there may have been no existing law, or imperial rescript against the Christians; and Paul, having been absent from Rome at the time, could not be implicated in the charge of incendiarism; yet the representative of Nero, if faithfully described by Dion Cassius *, would pay little regard to the forms of criminal justice, and would have no scruple in ordering the summary execution of an obscure individual, since it does not appear, that in exercising the jurisdiction of præfect of the city, he treated the lives of knights or of senators with more respect. There is, therefore, no improbability that the Christian church in Rome may have faithfully preserved the fact of Paul's execution, and even cherished in their pious memory the spot on the Ostian road, watered by the blood of the Apostle. As a Roman citizen,

Martyrdom of Paul.

* Τοὺς μέντοι ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ καὶ τῇ Ἰταλίᾳ πάντας Ἡλίῳ τινὶ Καισαρείῳ ἐκδότους παρέδωκε. Πάντα γὰρ ἁπλῶς ἐπετέτραπτο, ὥστε καὶ δημεύειν, καὶ φυγαδεύειν, καὶ ἀποκτιννύναι (καὶ πρὶν δηλῶσαι τῷ Νέρωνι) καὶ ἰδιώτας ὁμοίως, καὶ ἱππέας καὶ βουλευτάς. Οὕτω μὲν δὴ τότε ἡ τῶν Ρωμαίων ἀρχὴ δύο αὐτοκράτορσιν ἅμα ἐδούλευε, Νέρωνι καὶ Ἡλίῳ. Οὐδὲ ἔχω εἰπεῖν ὁπότερος αὐτῶν χείρων ἦν. Dion. Cassius, (or Xiphilin) lxiii. c. 12.

Paul is said to have been beheaded, instead of being suspended to a cross, or exposed to any of those horrid tortures invented for the Christians; and so far the modest probability of the relation may confirm rather than impeach its truth. The other circumstances—his conversion of the soldiers who carried him to execution, and of the executioner himself—bear too much the air of religious romance. Though, indeed, the Roman Christians had not the same interest in inventing or embellishing the martyrdom of Paul, as that of the other great Apostle from whom they derive their supremacy.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTIANITY TO THE CLOSE OF THE FIRST CENTURY. CONSTITUTION OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

Great revolutions slow and gradual.

THE changes in the moral are usually wrought as imperceptibly as those in the physical world. Had any wise man, either convinced of the divine origin of Christianity, or even contemplating with philosophical sagacity the essential nature of the new religion, and the existing state of the human mind, ventured to predict, that from the ashes of these obscure men would arise a moral sovereignty more extensive and lasting than that of the Cæsars; that buildings more splendid than any which adorned the new marble city, now rising from the ruins of the conflagration, would be dedicated to their name, and maintain their reverence for an incalculably longer period; such vaticinations would have met the fate inseparable from the wisdom which outstrips its age, would have been scorned by cotemporary pride, and only admired after their accomplishment, by late posterity. The slight and contemptuous notice excited by Christianity during the first century of its promulgation is in strict accordance with this ordinary development of the great and lasting revolutions in human affairs. The moral world has sometimes, indeed, its volcanic explosions, which suddenly and violently convulse and reform the order of things; but its more en-

during changes are in general produced by the slow and silent workings of opinions, remotely prepared and gradually expanding to their mature and irresistible influence. In default therefore of real information, as to the secret but simultaneous progress of Christianity in so many quarters, and among all ranks, we are left to speculate on the influence of the passing events of the time, and of the changes in the public mind, whether favourable or prejudicial to the cause of Christianity, catching only faint and uncertain gleams of its peculiar history through the confused and rapidly changing course of public affairs.

Imperial history divided into four periods.

The Imperial history from the first promulgation of Christianity down to the accession of Constantine, divides itself into four distinct, but unequal periods. More than thirty years are occupied by the line of the first Cæsars, rather less by the conflicts which followed the death of Nero, and the government of the Flavian dynasty. The first years of Trajan, who ascended the Imperial throne, A.D. 98., nearly synchronize with the opening of the second century of Christianity; and that splendid period of internal peace and advancing civilisation, of wealth, and of prosperity, which has been described as the happiest in the annals of mankind, extends over the first eighty years of that century.* Down to the accession of Constantine, nearly

* Among the writers who have discussed this question may be consulted Hegewisch, whose work has been recently translated by M. Solvet, under the title of Essai sur l'Epoque de l'Histoire Romaine la plus heureuse pour le Genre Humain. Paris, 1834.

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at the commencement of the fourth century, the empire became, like the great monarchies of the East, the prize of successful ambition and enterprise: almost every change of ruler is a change of dynasty; and already the borders of the empire have ceased to be respected by the menacing, the conquering Barbarians.

First period to the death of Nero.

It is remarkable how singularly the political character of each period was calculated to advance the growth of Christianity.

During the first of these periods the government, though it still held in respect the old republican institutions, was, if not in form, in its administration purely despotic. The state centered in the person of the Emperor. This kind of hereditary autocracy is essentially selfish: it is content with averting or punishing plots against the person, or detecting and crushing conspiracies against the power, of the existing monarch. To those more remote or secret changes, which are working in the depths of society, eventually perhaps threatening the existence of the monarchy, or the stability of all the social relations, it is blind or indifferent. * It has neither sagacity to discern, intelligence to comprehend, nor even the disinterested zeal for the perpetuation of its own despotism, to counteract such distant and contingent dangers. Of all innovations it is, in general, sensitively jealous; but they must be palpable and manifest, and directly clashing

* Sævi proximis ingruunt. In this one pregnant sentence of Tacitus is explained the political secret, that the mass of the people have sometimes been comparatively unoppressed under the most sanguinary tyranny.

with the passions or exciting the fears of the sovereign. Even these are met by temporary measures. When an outcry was raised against the Egyptian religion as dangerous to public morality, an edict commanded the expulsion of its votaries from the city. When the superstition of the Emperor shuddered at the predictions of the mathematicians, the whole fraternity fell under the same interdict. When the public peace was disturbed by the dissensions among the Jewish population of Rome, the summary sentence of Claudius visited both Jews and Christians with the same indifferent severity. So the Neronian persecution was an accident arising out of the fire at Rome, no part of a systematic political plan for the suppression of foreign religions. It might have fallen on any other sect or body of men, who might have been designated as victims to appease the popular resentment. The provincial administrations would be actuated by the same principles as the central government, and be alike indifferent to the quiet progress of opinions, however dangerous to the existing order of things. Unless some breach of the public peace demanded their interference, they would rarely put forth their power; and content with the maintenance of order, the regular collection of the revenue, the more rapacious with the punctual payment of their own exactions, the more enlightened with the improvement and embellishment of the cities under their charge, they would look on the rise and propagation of a new religion with no more concern than that of a new philoso-

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phic sect, particularly in the eastern part of the empire, where the religions were in general more foreign to the character of the Greek or Roman Polytheism. The popular feeling during this first period would only under peculiar circumstances outstrip the activity of the government. Accustomed to the separate worship of the Jews, to them Christianity appeared at first only as a modification of that belief. Local jealousies or personal animosities might in different places excite a more active hostility; in Rome it is evident that the people were only worked up to find inhuman delight in the sufferings of the Christians, by the misrepresentations of the government, by superstitious solicitude to find some victims to appease the angry Gods, and that strange consolation of human misery, the delight of wreaking vengeance on whomsoever it can possibly implicate as the cause of the calamity.

During the whole then of this first period, to the death of Nero, both the primitive obscurity of Christianity, and the transient importance it assumed, as a dangerous enemy of the people of Rome, and subsequently as the guiltless victim of popular vengeance, would tend to its eventual progress. Its own innate activity, with all the force which it carried with it, both in its internal and external impulse, would propagate it extensively in the inferior and middle classes of society; while, though the great mass of the higher orders would still remain unacquainted with its real nature, and with its relation to its parent Judaism, it was quite

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enough before the public attention to awaken the curiosity of the more inquiring, and to excite the interest of those who were seriously concerned in the moral advancement of mankind. In many quarters, it is far from impossible that the strong revulsion of the public mind against Nero, after his death, may have extended some commiseration towards his innocent victims*: that the Christians were acquitted by the popular feeling of any real connection with the fire at Rome, appears evident from Tacitus, who retreats into vague expressions of general scorn and animosity.† At all events the persecution must have had the effect of raising the importance of Christianity, so as to force it upon the notice of many, who might otherwise have been ignorant of its existence: the new and peculiar fortitude with which the sufferers endured their unprecedented trials, would strongly recommend it to those who were dissatisfied with the moral power of their old religion; while on the other hand it was yet too feeble and obscure to provoke a systematic plan for its suppression.

Second period to the accession of Trajan.

During the second period of the first century, from A. D. 68 to 98, the date of the accession of Trajan, the larger portion was occupied by the reign of Domitian, a tyrant, in whom the successors of Augustus might appear to revive, both in the monstrous vices of his personal character, and of his government. Of the Flavian dynasty, the

* This was the case even in Rome. Unde quanquam adversus sontes et novissima exempla meritos, miseratio oriebatur, tanquam non utilitate publicâ, sed in sævitiam unius absumerentur. Tac. An. xv. 44.

† Odio humani generis convicti.

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father alone, Vespasian, from the comprehensive vigour of his mind, perhaps from his knowledge of the Jewish character and religion, obtained during his residence in the East, was likely to estimate the bearings and future prospects of Christianity. But the total subjugation of Judæa, and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, having reduced the religious parents of the Christians to so low a state, their nation and consequently their religion, being, according to the ordinary course of events, likely to mingle up and become absorbed in the general population of the Roman empire, Christianity, it might reasonably be supposed, would scarcely survive its original stock, and might be safely left to burn out by the same gradual process of extinction. Besides this, the strong mind of Vespasian was fully occupied by the restoration of order in the capital and in the provinces, and in fixing on a firm basis the yet unsettled authority of the Flavian dynasty. A more formidable, because more immediate danger, threatened the existing order of things. The awful genius of Roman liberty had entered into an alliance with the higher philosophy of the time. Republican stoicism, brooding in the noblest minds of Rome, looked back with vain though passionate regret, to the free institutions of their ancestors, and demanded the old liberty of action. It was this dangerous movement, not the new and humble religion, which calmly acquiesced in all political changes, and contented itself with liberty of thought and opinion, which put to the test the

Stoic philosophers.

prudence and moderation of the emperor Vespasian. It was the spirit of Cato, not of Christ, which he found it necessary to control. The enemy before whom he trembled was the patriot Thrasea, not the Apostle St. John, who was silently winning over Ephesus to the new faith. The edict of expulsion from Rome fell not on the worshippers of foreign religions, but on the philosophers, a comprehensive term, but which was probably limited to those whose opinions were considered dangerous to the Imperial authority.

It was only with the new fiscal regulations of the rapacious and parsimonious Vespasian, that the Christians were accidentally implicated. The Emperor continued to levy the capitation tax, which had been willingly and proudly paid by the Jews throughout the empire for the maintenance of their own temple at Jerusalem, for the restoration of the idolatrous fane of the Capitoline Jupiter, which had been destroyed in the civil contests. The Jew submitted with sullen reluctance to this insulting exaction; but even the hope of escaping it would not incline him to disguise or dissemble his faith. But the Judaizing Christian, and even the Christian of Jewish descent, who had entirely thrown off his religion, yet was marked by the indelible sign of his race, was placed in a singularly perplexing position.† The

Temple tax.

* Tacit. Hist. iv. 4—9. Dion Cassius, lxvi. 13. Suetonius, Vespas. 15. Tillemont, Hist. des Empereurs. Vespasian. Art. xv.

† Dion Cassius. edit. Reimar, with his notes, lib. lxvi. p. 1082. Suetonius in Dom. v. 12. Martial, vii. 14. Basnage, Hist. des Juifs. vol. vii. ch. xi. p. 304.

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rapacious publican, who farmed the tax, was not likely to draw any true distinction among those whose features, connexions, name, and notorious descent, still designated them as liable to the tax: his coarser mind would consider the profession of Christianity as a subterfuge to escape a vexatious impost. But to the Jewish Christian of St. Paul's opinions, the unresisted payment of the burthen, however insignificant, and to which he was not bound, either by the letter or the spirit of the edict, was an acknowledgment of his unconverted Judaism, of his being still under the law, as well as an indirect contribution to the maintenance of heathenism. It is difficult to suppose that those who were brought before the public tribunal, as claiming an exemption from the tax, and exposed to the most indecent examination of their Jewish descent, were any other than this class of Judaizing Christians.

In other respects, the connexion of the Christians with the Jews could not but affect their place in that indiscriminating public estimation, which still, in general, notwithstanding the Neronian persecution, confounded them together.

Change in the condition and estimation of the Jews after the war.

The Jewish war appears to have made a great alteration both in the condition of the race of Israel, and in the popular sentiment towards them. From aversion as a sullen and unsocial, they were now looked upon with hatred and contempt, as a fierce, a desperate, and an enslaved race. Some of the higher orders, Agrippa and Josephus the historian, maintained a respectable, and even an

eminent rank at Rome; but the provinces were overrun by swarms of Jewish slaves, or miserable fugitives, reduced by necessity to the meanest occupations, and lowering their minds to their sordid and beggarly condition. As then to some of the Romans the Christian assertion of religious freedom would seem closely allied with the Jewish attempt to obtain civil independence, they might appear, especially to those in authority, to have inherited the intractable and insubordinate spirit of their religious forefathers; so, on the other hand, in some places, the Christian might be dragged down, in the popular apprehension, to the level of the fallen and outcast Jew. Thus, while Christianity in fact was becoming more and more alienated from Judaism, and even assuming the most hostile position, the Roman rulers would be the last to discern the widening breach, or to discriminate between that religious confederacy which was destined to absorb within it all the subjects of the Roman empire, and that race which was to remain in its social isolation, neither blended into the general mass of mankind, nor admitting any other within its insuperable pale. If the singular story related by Hegesippus * concerning the family of our Lord deserves credit, even the descendants of his house were endangered by their yet unbroken connection with the Jewish race. Domitian is said to have issued an edict for the extermination of the whole house of David, in order to annihilate for ever the hope of the Messiah, which still brooded with

The descendants of the brethren of our Lord brought before the tribunal.

* Eusebius, iii. 20.

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dangerous excitement in the Jewish mind. The grandsons of St. Jude, "the brother of our Lord," were denounced by certain heretics as belonging to the proscribed family, and brought before the tribunal of the Emperor, or, more probably, that of the Procurator of Judæa.* They acknowledged their descent from the royal race, and their relationship to the Messiah; but in Christian language they asserted, that the kingdom which they expected was purely spiritual and angelic, and only to commence at the end of the world, after the return to judgment. Their poverty, rather than their renunciation of all temporal views, was their security. They were peasants, whose hands were hardened with toil, and whose whole property was a farm of about twenty-four English acres, and of the value of 9000 drachms, or about 300*l.* pounds sterling. This they cultivated by their own labour, and regularly paid the appointed tribute. They were released as too humble and too harmless to be dangerous to the Roman authority, and Domitian, according to the singularly inconsistent account, proceeded to annul his edict of persecution against the Christians. Like all the stories which rest on the sole authority of Hegesippus, this has a very fabulous air. At no period were the hopes of the Messiah, entertained by the Jews, so little likely to awaken the jealousy of the Emperor, as in the reign of Domitian. The Jewish mind was still stunned, as it were, by the recent blow: the whole land was

* Gibbon thus modifies the story to which he appears to give some credit.

in a state of iron subjection. Nor was it till the latter part of the reign of Trajan, and that of Hadrian, that they rallied for their last desperate and conclusive struggle for independence. Nor, however indistinct the line of demarcation between the Jews and the Christians, is it easy to trace the connection between the stern precaution for the preservation of the peace of the Eastern world and the stability of the Empire against any enthusiastic aspirant after an universal sovereignty, with what is sometimes called the second great persecution of Christianity; for the exterminating edict was aimed at a single family, and at the extinction of a purely Jewish tenet. Though it may be admitted that, even yet, the immediate return of the Messiah to reign on earth was dominant among most of the Jewish Christians of Palestine. Even if true, this edict was rather the hasty and violent expedient of an arbitrary sovereign, trembling for his personal security, and watchful to avert danger from his throne, than a profound and vigorous policy, which aimed at the suppression of a new religion, declaredly hostile, and threatening the existence of the established Polytheism.

Christianity, however, appears to have forced itself upon the knowledge and the fears of Domitian in a more unexpected quarter, —the bosom of his own family.* Of his two cousins-german, the sons of Flavius Sabinus, the one fell an early victim to his jealous apprehensions. The other, Flavius

* Suetonius, in Domit. c. 15. Dion. Cassius, lxvii. 14. Eusebius, iii. 18.

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Flavius Clemens.

Clemens, is described by the epigrammatic biographer of the Cæsars, as a man of the most contemptible indolence of character. His peaceful kinsman, instead of exciting the fears, enjoyed, for some time, the favour, of Domitian. He received in marriage Domitilla, the niece of the Emperor, his children were adopted as heirs to the throne, Clemens himself obtained the consulship. On a sudden these harmless kinsmen became dangerous conspirators; they were arraigned on the unprecedented charge of Atheism and Jewish manners; the husband, Clemens, was put to death; the wife, Domitilla, banished to the desert island, either of Pontia, or Pandataria. The crime of Atheism was afterwards the common popular charge against the Christians; the charge to which, in all ages, those are exposed who are superior to the vulgar notion of the Deity. But it was a charge never advanced against Judaism; coupled, therefore, with that of Jewish manners, it is unintelligible, unless it refers to Christianity. Nor is it improbable that the contemptible want of energy, ascribed by Suetonius to Flavius Clemens, might be that unambitious superiority to the world which characterised the early Christian. Clemens had seen his brother cut off by the sudden and capricious fears of the tyrant; and his repugnance to enter on the same dangerous public career, in pursuit of honours which he despised, if it had assumed the lofty language of philosophy, might have commanded the admiration of his cotemporaries; but connected with a new religion, of

which the sublimer notions and principles were altogether incomprehensible, only exposed him to their more contemptuous scorn. Neither in his case was it the peril apprehended from the progress of the religion, but the dangerous position of the individuals professing the religion, so near to the throne, which was fatal to Clemens and Domitilla. It was the pretext, not the cause, of their punishment; and the first act of the reign of Nerva was the reversal of these sentences by the authority of the senate: the exiles were recalled, and an act, prohibiting all accusations of Jewish manners*, seems to have been intended as a peace-offering for the execution of Clemens, and for the especial protection of the Christians.

Legends of the missions of the Apostles into different countries.

But Christian history cannot pass over another incident assigned to the reign of Domitian, since it relates to the death of St. John the Apostle. Christian gratitude and reverence soon began to be discontented with the silence of the authentic writings as to the fate of the twelve chosen companions of Christ. It began first with some modest respect for truth, but soon with bold defiance of probability to brighten their obscure course, till each might be traced by the blaze of miracle into remote regions of the world, where it is clear, that if they had penetrated, no record of their existence was likely to survive.† These religious invaders, according to the later Christian romance, made a regular partition of the world, and assigned to each

* Dion Cassius, lxviii. 1.

† Euseb. Ecc. Hist. iii. 1. The tradition is here in its simpler and clearly more genuine form.

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the conquest of his particular province. Thrace, Scythia, Spain, Britain, Ethiopia, the extreme parts of Africa, India, the name of which mysterious region was sometimes assigned to the southern coast of Arabia, had each their Apostle, whose spiritual triumphs and cruel martyrdom were vividly pourtrayed and gradually amplified by the fertile invention of the Greek and Syrian historians of the early church. Even the history of St. John, whose later days were chiefly passed in the populous and commercial city of Ephesus, has not escaped. Yet legend has delighted in harmonising its tone with the character of the beloved disciple, drawn in the Gospel, and illustrated in his own writings. Even if purely imaginary, these stories show that another spirit was working in the mind of man. While then we would reject, as the offspring of a more angry and controversial age, the story of his flying in fear and indignation from a bath polluted by the presence of the heretic Cerinthus, we might admit the pleasing tradition that when he grew so feeble from age as to be unable to utter any long discourse, his last, if we may borrow the expression, his cycnean voice, dwelt on a brief exhortation to mutual charity.* His whole sermon consisted in these words: "Little children, love one another;" and when his audience remonstrated at the wearisome iteration of the same words, he declared that in these words was contained the whole substance of Christianity. The deportation of the Apostle to

Death of St. John.

* Euseb. Ecc. Hist. iii. 22.

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the wild island of Patmos, where general tradition places his writing the book of Revelations, is by no means improbable, if we suppose it to have taken place under the authority of the proconsul of Asia, on account of some local disturbance in Ephesus, and, notwithstanding the authority of Tertullian, reject the trial before Domitian at Rome, and the plunging him into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which he came forth unhurt.* Such are the few vestiges of the progress of Christianity which we dimly trace in the obscurity of the latter part of the first century. During this period, however, took place the regular formation of the young Christian republics, in all the more considerable cities of the Empire. The primitive constitution of these churches is a subject which it is impossible to decline, though few points in Christian history rest on more dubious and imperfect, in general on inferential evidence, yet few have been contested with greater pertinacity.

Constitution of Christian churches.

The whole of Christianity, when it emerges out of the obscurity of the first century, appears uniformly governed by certain superiors of each community, called bishops. But the origin and extent of this superiority, and the manner in which the bishop assumed a distinct authority from the inferior presbyters, is among those difficult questions

* Ubi (in Româ) Apostolus Johannes, postea quam in oleum igneum demersus, nihil passus est. Mosheim suspects that in this passage of Tertullian a metaphor has been converted into a fact. Mosheim, de Reb. Christ. ante Constant. p. 111.

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of Christian history which, since the Reformation, has been more and more darkened by those fatal enemies to candid and dispassionate inquiry, prejudice and interest. The earliest Christian communities appear to have been ruled and represented, in the absence of the Apostle who was their first founder, by their elders, who are likewise called bishops, or overseers of the churches. These presbyter bishops and the deacons are the only two orders which we discover at first in the church of Ephesus, at Philippi, and perhaps in Crete.* On the other hand, at a very early period, one religious functionary, superior to the rest, appears to have been almost universally recognised: at least, it is difficult to understand how, in so short a time, among communities, though not entirely disconnected, yet scattered over the whole Roman world, a scheme of government popular, or rather aristocratical, should become, even in form, monarchical. Neither the times nor the circumstances of the infant church, nor the primitive spirit of the religion, appear to favour a general, a systematic, and an unauthorised usurpation of power on the part of the supreme religious functionary.† Yet the change has already

* Acts, xx. 17., compared with 28. Philip. i. 1. Titus, i. 5—7.

† The most plausible way of accounting for this total revolution is by supposing that the affairs of each community or church were governed by a college of presbyters, one of whom necessarily presided at their meetings, and gradually assumed and was recognised as possessing a superior function and authority. In expressing my dissatisfaction with a theory adopted by Mosheim, by Gibbon, by Neander, and by most of the learned foreign writers, I have scrutinised my own motives with the utmost suspicion, and can only declare that I believe myself actuated only by the calm and candid desire of

taken place within the Apostolic times. The church of Ephesus, which in the Acts is represented by its elders, in the Revelations * is represented by its angel or bishop. We may, perhaps, arrive at a more clear and intelligible view of this subject, by endeavouring to trace the origin and development of the Christian communities.

Christian churches formed from, and on the model of, the synagogue.

The Christian church was almost universally formed by a secession from a Jewish synagogue. Some synagogues may have become altogether Christian; but, in general, a certain part of an existing community of Jews and Gentile proselytes incorporated themselves into a new society, and met for the purpose of divine worship in some private chamber, — sometimes, perhaps, in a public place, as rather later, during the times of persecution,

truth. But the universal and almost simultaneous elevation of the bishop, under such circumstances, in every part of the world (though it must be admitted that he was for a long time assisted by the presbyters in the discharge of his office), appears to me an insuperable objection to this hypothesis. The later the date which is assumed for the general establishment of the episcopal authority, the less likely was it to be general. It was only during the first period of undivided unity that such an usurpation, for so it must have been according to this theory, could have been universally acquiesced in without resistance. All presbyters, according to this view, with one consent, gave up or allowed themselves to be deprived of their co-ordinate and coequal dignity. The further we advance in Christian history, the more we discover the common motives of human nature at work. In this case alone are we to suppose them without influence? Yet we discover no struggle, no resistance, no controversy. The uninterrupted line of bishops is traced by the ecclesiastical historian up to the Apostles; but no murmur of remonstrance against this usurpation has transpired; no schism, no breach of Christian unity followed upon this momentous innovation. Nor does any such change appear to have taken place in the office of elder in the Jewish communities: the rabbinical teachers took the form of a regular hierarchy; their patriarch grew up into a kind of pope, but *episcopal* authority never took root in the synagogue.

* Chap. ii. 1.

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in a cemetery. The first of these may have answered to a synagogue, the latter to an unwalled proseucha. The model of the ancient community would naturally, as far as circumstances might admit, become that of the new. But in their primary constitution there was an essential point of difference. The Jews were a civil as well as a religious, the Christians exclusively a religious, community. Every where that the Jews were settled, they were the colony of a nation, they were held together almost by a kindred, as well as by a religious, bond of union. The governors, therefore, of the community, the Zakinim or Elders, the Parnasim or Pastors (if this be an early appellation), were by no means necessarily religious functionaries.* Another kind of influence, besides that of piety, age, worldly experience, wealth, would obtain the chief and ruling power in the society. Their government neither rested on, nor required, spiritual authority. Their grave example would enforce the general observance, their censure repress any flagrant departure from the law: they might be consulted on any difficult or unusual point of practice; but it was not till the new rabbinical priesthood was established, and the Mischna and the Talmud universally received as the national code, that the foreign Jews fell under what may be con-

* In some places, the Jews seem to have been ruled by an Ethnarch, recognised by the Roman civil authorities. Strabo, quoted by Josephus, Antiq. xiv. 12., speaks of the Ethnarch in Alexandria. Josephus mentions their Archon or chief, in Antioch. The more common constitution seems to have been the γεραιοι and δυνατοι,— the elders or authorities.

Essential difference between the church and synagogue.

sidered sacerdotal dominion. At this time, the synagogue itself was only supplementary to the great national religious ceremonial of the Temple. The Levitical race claimed no peculiar sanctity, at least it discharged no priestly office, beyond the bounds of the Holy Land, or the precincts of the Temple; nor was an authorised instructor of the people necessary to the service of the synagogue. It was an assembly for the purpose of worship, not of teaching. The instructor of the people, the copy of the law, lay in the ark at the east end of the building; it was brought forth with solemn reverence, and an appointed portion read during the service. But oral instruction, though it might sometimes be delivered, was no *necessary* part of the ceremonial. Any one, it should seem, who considered himself qualified, and obtained permission from the archisynagogi, the governors of the community, who exercised a sort of presidence in the synagogue, might address the assembly. It was in this character that the Christian Apostle usually began to announce his religion. But neither the chazan, or angel* of the synagogue (which was a purely ministerial, comparatively a servile, office), nor the heads of the assembly, possessed any peculiar privilege, or were endowed with any official function as teachers† of the people. Many of the more remote

* The angel here seems to bear its lower meaning—a messenger or minister.

† Vitringa labours to prove the point, that the chief of the synagogue exercised an office of this kind, but in my opinion without success. It appears to have been a regular part of the Essenian service, a distinction which Vitringa has neglected to observe. De Syn. Vet. l. iii. c. 6, 7.

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synagogues can rarely have been honoured by the presence of the "Wise Men," as they were afterwards called, —the lawyers of this period. The Jewish religion was, at this time, entirely ceremonial; it did not necessarily demand exposition; its form was moulded into the habits of the people; and till disturbed by the invasion of Christianity, or among very flourishing communities, where it assumed a more intellectual tone, and extended itself by the proselytism of the Gentiles, it was content to rest in that form.* In the great days of Jewish intellectual activity, the adjacent law school, usually inseparable from the synagogue, might rather be considered the place of religious instruction. This was a kind of chapter-house or court of ecclesiastical, with the Jews identical with their national, law. Here knotty points were publicly debated; and "the Wise," or the more distinguished of the lawyers or interpreters of the law, as the rabbinical hierarchy of a later period, established their character for sagacious discernment of the meaning and intimate acquaintance with the whole body of the law.

Thus, then, the model upon which the church might be expected to form itself, may be called purely aristocratical. The process by which it passed into the monarchical form, however limited the supreme power of the individual, may be traced to the

* The reading of the law, prayers, and psalms, were the ceremonial of the synagogue. Probably the greater part of their proselytism took place in private, though, as we know from Horace, the Jewish synagogue was even in Rome a place of resort to the curious, the speculative, and the idle.

existence of a monarchical principle anterior to their religious oligarchy, and which distinguished the Christian church in its first origin from the Jewish synagogue. The Christians from the first were a purely religious community; this was their primary bond of union; they had no national law which held them together as a separate people. Their civil union was a subordinate effect, arising out of their incorporation as a spiritual body. The submission of their temporal concerns to the adjudication of their own community was a consequence of their respect for the superior justice and wisdom which sprung from their religious principles, and an aversion from the litigious spirit engendered by the complicated system of Roman jurisprudence.* In their origin they were almost universally a community, formed, as it were, round an individual. The Apostle, or primitive teacher, was installed at once in the office of chief religious functionary; and the chief religious functionary is the natural head of a purely religious community. Oral instruction, as it was the first, so it must have continued to be the living, conservative, and expansive principle of the community.† It was, anterior to the existence of any book, the inspired

Christian church formed round an individual.

* The Apostle enjoined this secession from the ordinary courts of justice, 1 Cor. vi. 1—8.

† For some time, indeed, as in the Jewish synagogue, what was called the gift of prophecy seems to have been more general; any individual who professed to speak under the direct impulse of the Holy Spirit was heard with attentive reverence. But it may be questioned whether this, and the display of the other χαρίσματα recounted by the Apostle, 1 Cor. xii. 4—10., were more than subsidiary to the regular and systematic teaching of the apostolic founder of the community. The question is not whether each member was not at liberty to contribute by any

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record and supreme authority of the faith. As long as this teacher remained in the city, or as often as he returned, he would be recognised as the legitimate head of the society. But not only the Apostle, in general the primitive teacher likewise, was a missionary, travelling incessantly into distant regions for the general dissemination of Christianity, rather than residing in one spot to organise a local community.* In his absence, the government, and even the instruction, of the community devolved upon the senate of Elders, yet there was still a recognised supremacy in the founder of the church.† The wider, however, the dissemination of Christianity, the more rare, and at longer intervals, the presence of the Apostle. An appeal to his authority, by letter, became more precarious and interrupted; while, at the same time, in many communities, the necessity for his interposition became more frequent and manifest‡; and in the common

faculty which had been bestowed on him by God, to the general edification; but whether, above and anterior to all this, there was not some recognised parent of each church, who was treated with paternal deference, and exercised, when present, paternal authority.

* Yet we have an account of a residence even of St. Paul of eighteen months at Corinth, of two years at Ephesus, and he was two years during his first imprisonment at Rome. Acts, xviii. 11.; xix. 10.; xxviii. 30.

† St. Paul considered himself invested with the superintendence of all the churches which he had planted. 2 Cor. xi. 28.

‡ St. Jerome, quoted by Hooker (Eccles. Polity, b.vii.vol.iii.p.130.), assigns the origin of episcopacy to the dissensions in the church, which required a stronger coercive authority. "Till through instinct of the devil, there grew in the church factions, and among the people it began to be professed, I am of Paul, I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, churches were governed by the common advice of presbyters: but when every one began to reckon those who he had baptized his own, and not Christ's, it was decreed *in the whole world* that one chosen out of the presbyters should be placed above the rest, to whom all care of the

order of nature, even independent of the danger of persecution, the primitive founder, the legitimate head of the community, would vacate his place by death. That the Apostle should appoint some distinguished individual as the delegate, the representative, the successor, to his authority, as primary instructor of the community; invest him in an episcopacy or overseership, superior to that of the co-ordinate body of Elders, is, in itself, by no means improbable; it harmonises with the period in which we discover, in the Sacred Writings, this change in the form of the permanent government of the different bodies; accounts most easily for the general submission to the authority of one religious chief magistrate, so unsatisfactorily explained by the accidental pre-eminence of the president of a college of co-equal presbyters; and is confirmed by general tradition, which has ever, in strict unison with every other part of Christian history, preserved the names of many successors of the Apostles, the first bishops in most of the larger cities in which Christianity was first established. But the authority of the bishop was that of influence, rather than of power. After the first nomination by the Apostle (if such nomination, as we suppose, generally took place), his successor was elective by that kind of acclamation which raised at once the individual

Authority of the bishop.

church should belong, and so all seeds of schism be removed."

The government of the church seems to have been considered a subordinate function. "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers: *after that*, miracles, the gifts of healing, helps, *governments*, diversities of tongues. 1 Cor. xii. 28.

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most eminent for his piety and virtue to the post, which was that of danger, as well as of distinction. For a long period, the suffrages of the community ratified the appointment. Episcopal government was thus, as long as Christianity remained unleavened by worldly passions and interests, essentially popular. The principle of subordination was inseparable from the humility of the first converts. Rights are never clearly defined till they are contested; nor is authority limited as long as it rests upon general reverence. When, on the one side, aggression, on the other, jealousy and mistrust, begin, then it must be fenced by usage and defined by law. Thus while we are inclined to consider the succession of bishops from the Apostolic times to be undeniable, the nature and extent of authority which they derived from the Apostles is altogether uncertain. The ordination or consecration, whatever it might be to that office, of itself conveyed neither inspiration nor the power of working miracles, which, with the direct commission from the Lord himself, distinguished and set apart the primary Apostles from the rest of mankind. It was only in a very limited and imperfect sense that they could, even in the sees founded by the Apostles, be called the successors of the Apostles.

The presbyters were, in their origin, the *ruling* powers of the young communities; but in a society founded solely on a religious basis, religious qualifications would be almost exclusively considered. In the absence, therefore, of the primary teacher, they would assume that office likewise. In this

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The presbyters.

they would differ from the Jewish elders. As the most eminent in piety and Christian attainments, they would be advanced by, or at least with, the general consent, to their dignified station. The same piety and attainments would designate them as best qualified to keep up and to extend the general system of instruction. They would be the regular and perpetual expositors of the Christian law*; the reciters of the life, the doctrines, the death, the resurrection of Christ; till the Gospels were written, and generally received, they would be the living Evangelists, the oral Scriptures, the spoken Gospel. They would not merely regulate and lead the devotions, administer the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper, but repeat again and again, for the further confirmation of the believers, and the conversion of Jews and Heathens, the facts and the tenets of the new religion. The government, in fact, in communities bound together by Christian brotherhood (such as we may suppose to have been the first Christian churches, which were happily undistracted by the disputes arising out of the Judaical controversy) would be an easy office, and entirely subordinate to that of instruction and edification. The communities would be almost self-governed by the principle of Christian love which

* Here, likewise, the possessors of the χαρίσματα would be the casual and subsidiary instructors, or rather the gifted promoters of Christian piety each in his separate sphere, according to his distinctive grace. But besides these, even if they were found in all churches, which is by no means clear, regular and systematic teachers would be necessary to a religion which probably could only subsist, certainly could not propagate itself with activity or to any great extent, except by this constant exposition of its principles in the public assembly, as well as in the more private communications of individuals.

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first drew them together. The deacons were from the first an inferior order, and exercised a purely ministerial office; distributing the common fund to the poorer members, though the administration of the pecuniary concerns of the church soon became of such importance as to require the superintendence of the higher rulers. The other functions of the deacons were altogether of a subordinate character.

Such would be the ordinary development of a Christian community, in the first case, monarchical, as founded by an individual Apostle or recognised teacher of Christianity; subsequently, in the absence of that teacher, aristocratical, under a senate formed according to Jewish usage, though not precisely on Jewish principles; until the place of the Apostle being supplied by a bishop, in a certain sense, his representative or successor, it would revert to a monarchical form, limited rather by the religion itself than by any appointed controlling power. As long as the same holy spirit of love and charity actuated the whole body, the result would be an harmony, not from the counteracting powers of opposing forces, but from the consentient will of the general body; and the will of the government would be the expression of the universal popular sentiment.* Where, however,

* Such is the theory of episcopal government in a pleasing passage in the Epistles of Ignatius. "Οθεν πρέπει ὑμῖν συντρεχειν τῇ τοῦ επισκόπου γνώμῃ. "Οπερ καὶ ποιεῖτε. Τὸ γὰρ ἀξιονόμαστον ὑμῶν πρεσβυτέριον, οὕτως συνήρμοσται τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ ὡς χορδαὶ κιθάρᾳ· διὰ τοῦτο εν τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ ὑμῶν, καὶ συμφώνῳ ἀγάπῃ Ἰησοῦς Χρίστος ἄδεται καὶ οἱ κατ' ἄνδρα δὲ χορὸς γίνεσθε, ἵνα σύμφωνοι ὄντες ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ, χρῶμα Θεοῦ λα-

from the first, the Christian community was formed of conflicting parties, or where conflicting principles began to operate immediately upon the foundation of the society, no individual would be generally recognised as the authoritative teacher, and the assumption and recognition of the episcopate would be more slow; or, indeed, would not take place at all till the final triumph of one of the conflicting parties. They retained, of necessity, the republican form. Such was the state of the Corinthian church, which was formed from its origin, or almost immediately divided into three separate parties, with a leading teacher or teachers at the head of each.* The Petrine, or the ultra Judaic, the Apolline, or more moderate Jewish party, contested the supremacy with the followers of St. Paul. Different individuals possessed, exercised, and even abused different gifts. The authority of Paul himself appears clearly, by his elaborate vindication of his apostolic office, by no means to have been generally recognised. No apostolic head, therefore, would assume an uncontested supremacy, nor would the parties coalesce in the choice of a superior. Corinth, probably, was the last community which

Church of Corinth an exception.

ζόντες εν ἑνότητι, ἄδετε εν φωνῇ μιᾷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ πατρὶ, &c. Ad Ephes. p. 12. edit. Cotel. I speak of these epistles in a subsequent note.

* I was led to conjecture that the distracted state of the church of Corinth might induce the Apostles to establish elsewhere a more firm and vigorous authority, before I remembered the passage of St. Jerome quoted above, which coincides with this view. Corinth has been generally taken as the model of the early Christian constitution; I suspect, that it was rather an anomaly.

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settled down under the general episcopal constitution.

The manner and the period of the separation of a distinct class, an hierarchy, from the general body of the community; and the progress of the great division between the clergy and the laity*, are equally obscure with the primitive constitution of the church. Like the Judaism of the provinces, Christianity had no sacerdotal order. But as the more eminent members of the community were admitted to take the lead, on account of their acknowledged religious superiority, from their zeal, their talents, their gifts, their sanctity, the general reverence would, of itself, speedily set them apart as of a higher order; they would form the purest aristocracy, and soon be divided by a distinct line of demarcation from the rest of the community. Whatever the ordination might be which designated them for their peculiar function, whatever power or authority might be communicated by the "imposition of hands," it would add little to the reverence with which they were invested. It was at first the Christian who sanctified the function, afterwards the function sanctified the man. But the civil and religious concerns of the church were so moulded up together, or rather, the temporal were so absorbed by the

* Already the λαικοι are a distinct class in the Epistle of Clemens to the Corinthians (c. xl. p. 170. edit. Coteler.). This epistle is confidently appealed to by both parties in the controversy about church government, and altogether satisfies neither. It is clear, however, from the tone of the whole epistle, that the church at Corinth was any thing rather than a model of church government: it had been rent with schisms ever since the days of the Apostle.

spiritual, that not merely the teacher, but the governor, not merely the bishop properly so called, but the presbyter, in his character of ruler, as well as of teacher, shared in the same peculiar veneration. The bishop would be necessarily mingled up in the few secular affairs of the community, the governors bear their part in the religious ceremonial. In this respect, again, they differed from their prototypes, or elders of the synagogue. Their office was, of necessity, more religious. The admission of members in the Jewish synagogue, except in the case of proselytes of righteousness, was a matter of hereditary right: circumcision was a domestic, not a public ceremony. But baptism, or the initiation into the Christian community, was a solemn ceremonial, requiring previous examination and probation. The governing power would possess and exercise the authority to admit into the community. They would perform, or at all events superintend, the initiatory rite of baptism. The other distinctive rite of Christianity, the celebration of the Lord's Supper, would require a more active interference and co-operation on the part of those who presided over the community. To this there was nothing analogous in the office of the Jewish elder. Order would require that this ceremony should be administered by certain individuals. If the bishop presided, after his appointment, both at the Lord's Supper itself and in the agape or feast which followed it, the elders would assist, not merely in maintaining order, but would officiate throughout

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the ceremony. In proportion to the reverence for the consecrated elements would be the respect towards those under whose especial prayers, and in whose hands, probably from the earliest period, they were sanctified for the use of the assembly. The presbyters would likewise possess the chief voice, a practical initiative, in the nomination of the bishop. From all these different functions, the presbyters, and at length the deacons, became, as well as the bishop, a sacred order. But the exclusive or sacerdotal principle once admitted in a religious community, its own corporate spirit, and the public reverence, would cause it to recede further and further, and draw the line of demarcation with greater rigour and depth. They would more and more insulate themselves from the commonalty of the Christian republic; they would become a senate, a patrician, or privileged order; and this secession into their peculiar sphere would be greatly facilitated by the regular gradations of the faithful and the catechumen, the perfect and the imperfect, the initiate and half-initiate, Christians. The greater the variety, the more strict the subordination of ranks.

Thus the bishop gradually assumed the title of pontiff; the presbyters became a sacerdotal order. From the Old Testament, and even from paganism, the Christians, at first as ennobling metaphors, adopted their sacred appellations. Insensibly the meaning of these significant titles worked into the Christian system. They assumed, as it were, a privilege of nearer approach to the Deity; and a

priestly caste grew rapidly up in a religion which, in its primary institution, acknowledged only one mediator between earth and heaven. We shall subsequently trace the growth of the sacerdotal principle, and the universal establishment of the hierarchy.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTIANITY AND ORIENTALISM.

Oriental religions.

CHRISTIANITY had not only to contend with the Judaism of its native region, and the Paganism of the Western world, but likewise with the Asiatic religions, which, in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, maintained their ground, or mingled themselves with the Grecian Polytheism, and had even penetrated into Palestine. In the silence of its authentic records, the direct progress of Christianity in the East can neither be accurately traced nor clearly estimated; its conflict with Orientalism is chiefly visible in the influence of the latter upon the general system of Christianity, and in the tenets of the different sects which, from Simon Magus to Manes, attempted to reconcile the doctrines of the Gospel with the theogonical systems of Asia. In the West, Christianity advanced with gradual, but unobstructed and unreceding, progress, till, first the Roman empire, and successively the barbarous nations who occupied or subdued the rest of Europe, were brought within its pale. No new religion arose to dispute its supremacy; and the feeble attempt of Julian to raise up a Platonic Paganism in opposition to the religion of Christ must have failed, even if it had not been cut short in its first growth by the death

of its imperial patron. In Asia, the progress of Christianity was suddenly arrested by the revival of Zoroastrianism, after the restoration of the Persian kingdom upon the ruins of the Parthian monarchy; and, at a later period, the vestiges of its former success were almost entirely obliterated by the desolating and all-absorbing conquests of Mahometanism. The Armenian was the only national church which resisted alike the persecuting edicts of the Sassanian fire-worshippers, and, submitting to the yoke of the Mahometan conqueror, rejected the worship of the Prophet. The other scattered communities of Christians, disseminated through various parts of Asia, on the coast of Malabar, perhaps in China, have no satisfactory evidence of Apostolic or even of very early date: they are so deeply impregnated with the Nestorian system of Christianity, which, during the interval between the decline of the reformed Zoroastrianism and the first outburst of Islamism, spread to a great extent throughout every part of the Eastern continent*, that there is every reason to suppose them Nestorian in their origin.† The contest, then, of Christianity with the Eastern religions must be traced in their reaction upon the new religion of the West. By their treacherous alliance, they probably operated more extensively to the detriment of the Evangelic religion than Paganism

* There is an extremely good view of the origin and history of the Christian communities in India, in Bohlen, das alte Indien.

† Compare the new edition of Gibbon with the editor's note on the Nestorian Christians and the famous inscription of Siganfu, viii. 347.

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by its open opposition. Asiatic influences have worked more completely into the body and essence of Christianity than any other foreign elements; and it is by no means improbable that tenets, which had their origin in India, have for many centuries predominated, or materially affected the Christianity of the whole Western world.

Situation of Palestine favourable for a new religion.

Palestine was admirably situated to become the centre and point of emanation for an universal religion. On the confines of Asia and Europe, yet sufficiently secluded from both to be out of the way of the constant flux and reflux of a foreign population, it commanded Egypt, and, through Egypt, associated Africa with the general moral kingdom. But it was not merely calculated for the birthplace of an universal faith by its local position; Judaism, as it were, in its character (putting out of sight, for an instant, its divine origin) stood between the religions of the East and the West. It was the connecting link between the European and the Asiatic mind. In speculative sublimity, the doctrine of the Divine Unity soared to an equal height with the vast and imaginative cosmogonies of the East, while in its practical tendencies it approximated to the active and rational genius of the West.

Judaism.

The religions of Asia appear, if not of regularly affiliated descent, yet to possess a common and generic character, modified, indeed, by the genius of the different people, and, perhaps, by the prevailing tone of mind in the authors and founders of new doctrines. From the banks of the Ganges,

probably from the shores of the Yellow Sea and the coasts of further India, to the Phœnician borders of the Mediterranean, and the undefined limits of Phrygia in Asia Minor, there was that connection and similitude, that community of certain elementary principles, that tendency to certain combinations of physical and moral ideas, which may be expressed by the term Orientalism.* The speculative theology of the higher, the sacerdotal, order, which in some countries left the superstitions of the vulgar undisturbed, or allowed their own more sublime conceptions to be lowered to their rude and limited material notions, aspired to the primal Source of Being. The Emanation system of India, according to which the whole worlds flowed from the Godhead and were finally to be reabsorbed into it; the Pantheism into which this degenerated, and which made the collective universe itself the Deity; the Dualism of Persia, according to which the antagonist powers were created by, or proceeded from, the One Supreme and Uncreated; the Chaldean doctrine of divine Energies or Intelligences, the prototypes of the cabalistic Sephiroth, and the later Gnostic Æons, the same, no doubt, under different names, with the Æon and Protogenes, the Genos and Genea, with their regularly-coupled descendants in the Phœnician cosmogony of Sanchoniathon; and finally, the primitive and

General character of Orientalism.

* Compare Windischman, Philosophie in fortgang der Welt Geschichte. Windischman was a friend, I believe I may venture to say, a disciple, of F. Schlegel, and belongs to the high Roman Catholic school in Germany. His book, which is full of abstruse thought and learning, develops the theory of a primitive tradition diffused through the East.

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simpler worship of Egypt; all these are either branches of one common stock, or expressions of the same state of the human mind, working with kindred activity on the same visible phenomena of nature, and with the same object. The Asiatic mind impersonated, though it did not, with the Greek, humanise every thing. Light and Darkness, Good and Evil, the Creative and Destructive energy of nature, the active and passive Powers of generation, moral Perfection and Wisdom, Reason and Speech, even Agriculture and the Pastoral life, each was a distinct and intelligent being; they wedded each other according to their apparent correspondences; they begat progeny according to the natural affiliation or consequence of ideas. One great elementary principle pervaded the whole religious systems of the East, the connection of *moral with physical ideas*, the inherent *purity, the divinity, of mind or spirit*, the inalienable *evil of its antagonist, matter*. Whether Matter co-existed with the First Great Cause; whether it was created by his power, but from its innate malignity became insubordinate to his will; whether it was extraneous to his existence, necessarily subsisting, though without form, till its inert and shapeless mass was worked upon by the Deity himself, or by his primal power or emanation, the Demiurge or Creator of the existing worlds: on these points the different national creeds were endlessly diversified. But in its various forms, the principle itself was the universal doctrine of the Eastern world; it was developed in their loftiest philosophy (in fact, their higher

Purity of mind.

Malignity of matter.

philosophy and their speculative religion were the same thing); it gave a kind of colouring even to their vulgar superstition, and operated, in many cases, almost to an incredible extent, on their social and political system. This great primal tenet is alike the elementary principle of the higher Brahminism and the more moral Buddhism of India and the remoter East. The theory of the division of castes supposes that a larger portion of the pure mind of the Deity is infused into the sacerdotal and superior orders; they are nearer the Deity, and with more immediate hope of being reabsorbed into the divine essence; while the lower classes are more inextricably immersed in the grosser matter of the world, their feeble portion of the essential spirit of the Divinity contracted and lost in the predominant mass of corruption and malignity.* The Buddhist, substituting a moral for an hereditary approximation to the pure and elementary mind, rests, nevertheless, on the same primal theory, and carries the notion of the abstraction of the spiritual part from the foul and corporeal being to an equal, if not a greater, height of contemplative mysticism. † Hence the sanctity of fire among the Persians ‡; that element which is

The universal primary principle.

* The self-existing power declared the purest part of him to be the mouth. Since the Brahmen sprung from the most excellent part; since he was the first born, and since he possesses the Veda, he is by right the chief of the whole creation. Jones's Menu, i. 92, 93.

† See the tracts of Mahony, Joinville, Hodgson, and Wilson, in the Asiatic Researches; Schmidt, Geschichte der Ost Mongolen. Bergman, Nomadische Streifereyen, &c.

‡ Hyde, de Relig. Persarum, p. 13. et alibi. Kleuker, Anhang zum Zendavesta, vol. i. p. 116, 117. De Guigniaut, Religions de l'Antiquité, l. ii. c. 3. p. 333.

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most subtle and defæcated from all material corruption; it is therefore the representative of pure elementary mind, of Deity itself. * It exists independent of the material forms in which it abides, the sun and the heavenly bodies. To infect this holy element with any excretion or emanation from the material form of man; to contaminate it with the putrescent effluvia of the dead and soulless corpse, was the height of guilt and impiety.

Source of Asceticism.

This one simple principle is the parent of that Asceticism which maintained its authority among all the older religions of the remoter East, forced its way at a very early period into Christianity, where, for some centuries it exercised a predominant influence, and subdued even the active and warlike genius of Mahometanism to its dreamy and extatic influence. On the cold table-lands of Thibet, in the forests of India, among the busy population of China, on the burning shores of Siam, in Egypt and in Palestine, in Christianised Europe, in Mahometanised Asia, the worshipper of the Lama, the Faquir, the Bonze, the Talapoin, the Essene, the Therapeutist, the Monk, and the Dervish, have withdrawn from the society of man, in order to abstract the pure mind from the dominion of foul and corrupting matter. Under each system, the perfection of human nature was estrangement from the influence of the senses,—those senses which were enslaved to the material elements of the world; an approximation to the essence of the

* Kleuker, Anhang zum Zendavesta, vol. i. pt. 2. p. 147. De Guigniaut, ubi supra.

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Deity, by a total secession from the affairs, the interests, the passions, the thoughts, the common being and nature of man. The practical operation of this elementary principle of Eastern religion has deeply influenced the whole history of man. But it had made no progress in Europe till after the introduction of Christianity. The manner in which it allied itself with, or rather incorporated itself into, a system, to the original nature and design of which it appears altogether foreign, will form a most important and perhaps not uninteresting chapter in the History of Christianity.

Celibacy.

Celibacy was the offspring of Asceticism, but it does not appear absolutely essential to it; whether insulted nature re-asserts its rights, and reconciles to the practice that which is in apparent opposition to the theory, or whether it revenges, as it were, this rebellion of nature on one point, by its more violent and successful invasions upon its unconquerable propensities on others. The Muni in India is accompanied by his wife, who shares his solitude, and seems to offer no impediment to his sanctity *, though in some cases it may be that all

* Abandoning all food eaten in towns, and all his household utensils, let him repair to the lonely wood, committing the care of his wife to his sons, or accompanied by her, if she choose to attend him. Sir W. Jones's Menu, vi. 3. I venture to refer to the pathetic tale of the hermit with his wife and son, from the Mahâ Bhârata, in my translations from the Sanskrit.

In the very curious account of the Buddhist monks (the Σαμανaιοι—the Schamans) in Porphyrius de Abstinentiâ, lib. iv. 17., the Buddhist ascetic abandons his wife; and this in general agrees with the Buddhist theory. Female contact is unlawful to the Buddha ascetic. See a curious instance in Mr. Wilson's Hindu Theatre — *The Toycart*. Act viii., sub fine.

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connubial intercourse is sternly renounced. In Palestine, the Essene, in his higher state of perfection, stood in direct opposition to the spirit of the books of Moses, on which he still looked with the profoundest reverence, by altogether refraining from marriage. It was perhaps in this form that Eastern Asceticism first crept into Christianity. It assumed the elevating and attractive character of higher personal purity; it drew the line of demarcation more rigidly against the loose morality of the Heathen; it afforded the advantage of detaching the first itinerant preachers of Christianity more entirely from worldly interests; enabled them to devote their whole undistracted attention to the propagation of the Faith, and left them, as it were, more at loose from the world, ready to break the few and slender ties which connected them with it at the first summons to a glorious martyrdom.* But it was not, as we shall presently observe, till Gnosticism began to exercise its influence on Christianity† that, emulous of its dangerous rival, or infected with its foreign opinions, the Church, in its general sentiment, espoused and magnified the pre-eminent virtue of celibacy.‡

* Clement of Alexandria, however, asserts that St. Paul was really married, but left his wife behind him, lest she should interfere with his ministry. This is his interpretation of 1 Cor. ix. 5.

† Tertullian adv. Marc. i. 29. Non tingitur apud illum caro, nisi virgo, nisi vidua, nisi cælebs, nisi divortio baptismum mereatur * * nec præscribimus sed suademus sanctitatem * * * tunc denique conjugium exertè defendentes cum inimicè accusatur spurcitiæ nomine in destructionem creatoris qui proinde conjugium pro rei honestate benedixit, incrementum generis humani * *.

‡ Compare the whole argument of the third book of the Stromata of Clement of Alexandria. In one passage he condemns celibacy,

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Unknown in Greece and Rome.

The European mind of the older world, as represented by the Greeks and Romans, repelled for a long time, in the busy turmoil of political development, and the absorbing career of war and conquest, this principle of inactivity and secession from the ordinary affairs of life. No sacerdotal caste established this principle of superiority over the active warrior, or even the laborious husbandman. With the citizen of the stirring and factious republics of Greece, the highest virtue was of a purely political and practical character. The whole man was public: his individuality, the sense of which was continually suggested and fostered under the other system, was lost in the member of the commonwealth. That which contributed nothing to the service of the state was held in no respect. The mind, in its abstracted flights, obtained little honour, it was only as it worked upon the welfare, the amusement, or the glory of the republic, that its dignity was estimated. The philosopher might discuss the comparative superiority of the practical or the contemplative life, but his loftiest contemplations were occupied with realities, or what may be considered idealising those realities to a higher degree of perfection: to make good citizens was the utmost ambition of his wisdom, an Utopia was his heaven. The Cynic, who in the East, or in Europe, after it became impregnated with Eastern doctrines, would have re-

as leading to misanthropy. Συνορῶ τὴν ἁγίαν γνῶσιν, εἰς μισανθρωπίαν δὲ ὅπως τῇ προφάσει τοῦ γάμου οἱ ὑπερῤῥύησαν, καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀγάπης μὲν ἀπεσχημένοι τούτου, μὴ κατὰ οἴχεται παρ' αὐτοῖς. Strom. iii. 9.

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tired into the desert to his solitary hermitage, in order to withdraw himself entirely from the common interests, sentiments, and connections of mankind; in Greece, took up his station in the crowded forum, or pitching his tub in the midst of the concourse at the public games, inveighed against the vices and follies of mankind. Plato, if he had followed the natural bent of his genius, might have introduced, and indeed did introduce, as much as the Grecian mind was capable of imbibing, of this theory of the opposition of mind and matter, with its ordinary consequences. The communities of his older master Pythagoras, who had probably visited the East, and drank deep of the Oriental mysticism, approached in some respects nearer to the contemplative character of monastic institutions. But the active mind of the Greek predominated, and the followers of Pythagoras, instead of founding cœnobitic institutions, or secluding themselves in meditative solitude, settled some of the flourishing republics of Magna Græcia. But the great master, in whose steps Plato professed to tread more closely, was so essentially practical and unimaginative, as to bind his followers down to a less Oriental system of philosophy. While, therefore, in his Timæus, Plato attempted to harmonise parts of the cosmogonical theories of Asia with the more humanised mythology of Greece, the work which was more accordant to the genius of his country, was his Republic, in which all his idealism was, as it were, confined to the earth. Even his religion, though of much sublimer cast than the popular superstition,

Plato.

was yet considered chiefly in its practical operation on the welfare of the state. It was his design to elevate humanity to a higher state of moral dignity; to cultivate the material body as well as the immaterial soul, to the height of perfection; not to sever, as far as possible, the connection between these ill-assorted companions, or to withdraw the purer mind from its social and political sphere, into solitary and inactive communion with the Deity. In Rome, the general tendency of the national mind was still more essentially public and political. In the republic, except in a few less distinguished men, the Lælii and the Attici, even their philosophy was an intellectual recreation between the more pressing avocations of their higher duties: it was either to brace and mature the mind for future service to the state, or as a solace in hours of disappointed ambition, or the haughty satiety of glory. Civil science was the end and aim of all their philosophic meditation. Like their ancient king, if they retired for communion with the Egeria of philosophy, it was in order to bring forth, on their return, more ample stores of political and legislative wisdom. Under the imperial government, they took refuge in the lofty reveries of the porch, as they did in inordinate luxury, from the degradation and enforced inactivity of servitude. They fled to the philosophic retirement, from the barrenness, in all high or stirring emotions, which had smitten the Senate and the Comitia; still looking back with a vain but lingering hope that the state might summon them again from retirement without dignity, from a contempla-

Rome.

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tive life, which by no means implied an approximation to the divine, but rather a debasement, of the human nature. Some, indeed, degraded their high tone of philosophy by still mingling in the servile politics of the day; Seneca lived and died the votary and the victim of court intrigue. The Thraseas stood aloof, not in extatic meditation on the primal Author of Being, but on the departed liberties of Rome; their soul aspired no higher than to unite itself with the ancient genius of the republic.

Orientalism in Western Asia.

Orientalism had made considerable progress towards the West before the appearance of Christianity. While the popular Pharisaism of the Jews had embodied some of the more practical tenets of Zoroastrianism, the doctrines of the remoter East had found a welcome reception with the Essene. Yet even with him, regular and unintermitting labour, not inert and meditative abstraction, was the principle of the ascetic community. It might almost seem that there subsisted some secret and indelible congeniality, some latent consanguinity, whether from kindred, common descent, or from conquest, between the caste-divided population on the shores of the Ganges, and the same artificial state of society in the valley of the Nile, so as to assimilate in so remarkable a manner their religion.* It is certain, that the genuine Indian mysticism first established

* Bohlen's work, Das alte Indien, of which the excellence in all other respects, as a condensed abstract of all that our own countrymen and the scholars of Germany and France have collected concerning India, will be universally acknowledged, is written to maintain the theory of the early connection of India and Egypt.

a permanent western settlement in the deserts of Egypt. Its first combination seems to have been with the Egyptian Judaism of Alexandria, and to have arisen from the dreaming Platonism, which in the schools of that city had been engrafted on the Mosaic institutes. The Egyptian monks were the lineal descendants of the Jewish Therapeutæ, described by Philo.* Though the Therapeutæ, like the Essenes, were in some respects a productive community, yet they approached much nearer to the contemplative and indolent fraternities of the farther East. The arid and rocky desert around them was too stubborn to make much return to their less regular and systematic cultivation; visionary indolence would grow upon them by degrees. The communities either broke up into the lairs of solitary hermits, or were constantly throwing off their more enthusiastic votaries deeper into the desert: the severer mortifications of the flesh required a more complete isolation from the occupations, as well as the amusements or enjoyments of life. To change the wilderness into a garden by patient industry, was to enthrall the spirit in some degree to the service of the body; and in process of time, the principle was carried to its height. The more dreary the wilderness, the more unquestioned the sanctity of its inhabitant; the more complete and painful the privation, the more holy the worshipper; the more the man put off his own nature, and sank below the animal to vegetative existence, the more con-

* Philonis Opera. Mangey, vol. ii. p. 471.

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summate his spiritual perfection. The full growth of this system was of a much later period; it did not come to maturity till after Christianity had passed through its conflict with Gnosticism; but its elements were, no doubt, floating about in the different western regions of Asia, and either directly through Gnosticism, or from the emulation of the two sects, which outbid each other, as it were, in austerity, it worked, at length, into the very intimate being of the Gospel religion.

Combination of Orientalism with Christianity.

The singular felicity, the skill and dexterity, if we may so speak, with which Christianity at first wound its way through these conflicting elements, combining what was pure and lofty in each, in some instances unavoidably speaking their language, and simplifying, harmonising, and modifying each to its own peculiar system, increases our admiration of its unrivalled wisdom, its deep insight into the universal nature of man, and its pre-acquaintance, as it were, with the countless diversities of human character, prevailing at the time of its propagation. But, unless the same profound wisdom had watched over its inviolable preservation, which presided over its origin; unless it had been constantly administered with the same superiority to the common passions and interests, and speculative curiosity of man, a reaction of the several systems over which it prevailed was inevitable. On a wide and comprehensive survey of the whole history of Christianity, and considering it as left altogether to its own native force and impulse, it is difficult to estimate how far the

admission, even the predominance, of these foreign elements, by which it was enabled to maintain its hold on different ages and races, may not have contributed both to its original success and its final permanence. The Eastern asceticism outbid Christianity in that austerity, that imposing self-sacrifice, that intensity of devotion, which acts with the greatest rapidity, and secures the most lasting authority over rude and unenlightened minds. By coalescing to a certain point with its antagonist, it embraced within its expanding pale those who would otherwise, according to the spirit of their age, have been carried beyond its sphere by some enthusiasm more popular, and better suited to the genius of the time, or the temperament of the individual. If it lost in purity, it gained in power, perhaps, in permanence. No doubt, in its first contest with Orientalism were sown those seeds which grew up at a later period into Monasticism; it rejected the tenets, but admitted the more insidious principle of Gnosticism; yet there can be little doubt that in the dark ages, the monastic spirit was among the great conservative and influential elements of Christianity.

The form in which Christianity first encountered this wide-spread Orientalism, was either Gnosticism*, or, if that philosophy had not then become con-

* In this view of Gnosticism, besides constant reference to the original authorities, I must acknowledge my obligations to Brucker, Hist. Phil. vol. ii. p. 1. c. 3.; to Mosheim, de Reb. Christ. ante Const. Mag.; to Beausobre, Hist. du Manicheisme, but above all, to the excellent Histoire du Gnosticisme, by M. Matter of Strasburg, 2 vols. 8vo. Paris, 1828.

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Simon Magus.

solidated into a system, those opinions which subsequently grew up into that prevalent doctrine of Western Asia. The first Orientalist was Simon Magus. In the conflict with St. Peter, related in the Acts, nothing transpires as to the personal history of this remarkable man, excepting the extensive success with which he had practised his magical arts in Samaria, and the oriental title which he assumed —"the Power of God." His first overtures to the Apostle appear as though he were desirous of conciliating the friendship and favour of the new teacher, and would not have been unwilling to have acted a subordinate part in the formation of their increasing sect. But from his first rejection, Simon Magus was an opponent, if there be any truth in the wild legends, which are still extant, the rival, of Christianity.* On the arrival of the Christian teachers in Samaria, where, up to that period, his influence had predominated, he paid homage to the reality of their miracles, by acknowledging their superiority to his own. Still, it should seem that he only considered them as more adroit wonder-workers, or, as is more probable, possessed of some peculiar secrets beyond his own knowledge of the laws of nature, or, possibly (for imposture and superstition are ever

* It is among the most hopeless difficulties in early Christian history to decide, to one's own satisfaction, what groundwork of truth there may be in those works which bear the name of St. Clement, and relate the contests of St. Peter and Simon Magus. That in their present form they are a kind of religious romance, few will doubt; but they are certainly of great antiquity, and it is difficult to suppose either pure invention or mere embellishments of the simple history in the Acts.

closely allied), he may have supposed that they had intercourse with more powerful spirits or intelligences than his own. Jesus was to him either some extraordinary proficient in magic, who had imparted his prevailing gifts to his followers, the Apostles; or some superior genius, who lent himself to their bidding; or what Simon asserted himself to be, some power emanating more directly from the primal Deity. The "gift of the Holy Ghost" seemed to communicate a great portion, at least, of this magic influence, and to place the initiated in possession of some mighty secrets, or to endow him with the control of some potent spirits. Simon's offer of pecuniary remuneration betrays at once either that his own object was sordid, as he suspected theirs to be, or, at the highest, he sought to increase, by a combination with them, his own reputation and influence. Nor, on the indignant refusal of St. Peter, does his entreaty for their prayers, lest he should incur the wrath of their offended Deity, by any means imply a more accurate and Christian conception of their religion; it is exactly the tone of a man, half imposter and half enthusiast, who trembles before the offended anger of some mightier superhuman being, whom his ineffectual magic has no power to control or to appease. We collect no more than this from the narrative in the Acts.*

Yet, unless Simon was in fact a personage of considerable importance during the early history of Christianity, it is difficult to account for

* Acts, viii. 9. 24.

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his becoming, as he is called by Beausobre, the hero of the Romance of Heresy. If Simon was the same with that magician, a Cypriot by birth, who was employed by Felix as agent in his intrigue to detach Drusilla from her husband *, this part of his character accords with the charge of licentiousness advanced both against his life and his doctrines by his Christian opponents. This is by no means improbable; and indeed, even if he was not a person thus politically prominent and influential, the early writers of Christianity would scarcely have concurred in representing him as a formidable and dangerous antagonist of the Faith, as a kind of personal rival of St. Peter, without some other groundwork for the fiction besides the collision recorded in the Acts. The doctrines which are ascribed to him and to his followers, who continued to exist for several centuries †, harmonise with the glimpse of his character and tenets in the writings of St. Luke. Simon probably was one of that class of adventurers which abounded at this period, or like Apollonius of Tyana, and others at a later time, with whom the opponents of Christianity attempted to confound Jesus and his Apostles. His doctrine was Oriental in its language and in its pretensions.‡ He was the first Æon or emanation, or rather perhaps the first manifestation of the

His real character and tenets.

* Joseph. Ant. xx. 5. 2. Compare Krebs and Kuinoël, in loco Act. Apost.

† Origen denies the existence of living Simonians in his day (contra Cels. lib. i.); which implies that they had subsisted nearly up to that time.

‡ Irenæus, lib. i. c. 20.; the fullest of the early authorities on Simon. Compare Grabe's notes. The personal conflict with St. Peter in Rome, and the famous inscription "Semoni Sanco," must I think be abandoned to legend.

primal Deity. He assumed not merely the title of the Great Power or Virtue of God, but all the other appellations,—the Word, the Perfection, the Paraclete, the Almighty, the whole combined attributes of the Deity.* He had a companion, Helena, according to the statement of his enemies, a beautiful prostitute †, whom he found at Tyre, who became in like manner the first conception (the Ennœa) of the Deity; but who, by her conjunction with matter, had been enslaved to its malignant influence, and having fallen under the power of evil angels, had been in a constant state of transmigration, and among other mortal bodies, had occupied that of the famous Helen of Troy. Beausobre ‡, who elevates Simon into a Platonic philosopher, explains the Helena as a sublime allegory. She was the Psyche of his philosophic romance. The soul, by evil influences, had become imprisoned in matter. By her the Deity had created the angels: the angels, enamoured of her, had inextricably entangled her in that polluting bondage, in order to prevent her return to heaven. To fly from their embraces, she had passed from body to body. Connecting this fiction with the Grecian mythology, she was Minerva, or impersonated Wisdom; perhaps, also, Helena, or embodied Beauty.

CHAP. V.

His Helena.

It is by no means inconsistent with the character of Orientalism, or with the spirit of the times,

* Ego sum Sermo Dei, ego sum Speciosus, ego Paracletus, ego Omnipotens, ego omnia Dei. Hieronym. in Matth. Op. iv. 114.

† Irenæus, ibid.

‡ Beausobre, Hist. du Manicheisme, i. 35.

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to reconcile much of these different theories. According to the Eastern system of teaching by symbolic action, Simon may have carried about a living and real illustration of his allegory: his Helena may have been to his disciples the mystic image of an emanation from the divine Mind; her native purity, indeed, originally defiled by the contagious malignity of matter, but under the guidance of the Hierophant, or rather by her sanctifying association with the "Power of God," either soaring again to her primal sanctity, or even while the grosser body was still abandoned to its inalienable corruption, emancipating the uninfected and unparticipant soul from all the depravation, almost from the consciousness, of corporeal indulgence. Be this as it may; whether the opinions of Simon were derived from Platonism, or, as it is much more likely, immediately from Eastern sources, his history is singularly characteristic of the state of the public mind at this period of the world. An individual assuming the lofty appellation of the Power of God, and with his female associate, personating the male and female Energies or Intelligences of the Deity, appears to our colder European reason a fiction too monstrous even for the proverbial credulity of man. But this Magianism of Simon must be considered in reference to the whole theory of theurgy or magic, and the prevalent theosophy or notions of the divine nature. In the East, superstition had in general repudiated the grossly material forms in which the Western anthropomorphism had embodied its gods; it re-

Probability of the history of Simon.

mained more spiritual, but it made up for this by the fantastic manner in which it multiplied the gradations of spiritual beings more or less remotely connected with the first great Supreme. The more subtile the spirits, in general, they were the more beneficent; the more intimately associated with matter, the more malignant. The avowed object of Simon was to destroy the authority of the evil spirits, and to emancipate mankind from their control. This peopling of the universe with a regularly descending succession of beings was common to the whole East, perhaps, in great part, to the West. The later Jewish doctrine of angels and devils approached nearly to it; it lurked in Platonism, and assumed a higher form in the Eastern cosmogonies. In these it not merely assigned guardian or hostile beings to individuals or to nations, but its peculiar creator to the material universe, from which it aspired altogether to keep aloof the origin and author of the spiritual world; though the latter superior and benignant Being was ordinarily introduced as interfering in some manner to correct, to sanctify, and to spiritualise the world of man; and it was in accordance with this part of the theory, that Simon proclaimed himself the representative of Deity.

But Simon was at no time a Christian, neither was the heir and successor of his doctrines, Menander*;

* Menander baptized in his own name, being *sent* by the *Supreme Power* of God. His baptism conferred a resurrection not only to eternal life but to eternal youth. An opinion, as M. Matter justly observes, not easily reconcilable to those who considered the body the unworthy prison of the soul. Irenæus, i. 21. Matter, i. 219.

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and it was not till it had made some progress in the Syrian and Asiatic cities, that Christianity came into closer contact with those Gnostic, or pregnostic systems, which, instead of opposing it with direct hostility, received it with more insidious veneration, and warped it into an unnatural accordance with its own principles. As the Jew watched the appearance of Jesus, and listened to his announcement as the Messiah, in anxious suspense, expecting that even yet he would assume those attributes of temporal grandeur and visible majesty which, according to his conceptions, were inseparable from the true Messiah; as even after the death of Jesus, the Jewish Christians still eagerly anticipated his immediate return to judgment, his millennial reign, and his universal dominion: so many of the Oriental speculatists, as soon as Christianity began to be developed, hailed it as the completion of their own wild theories; and forced it into accordance with their universal tenet of distinct intelligences emanating from the primal Being. Thus Christ, who, to the vulgar Jew was to be a temporal king, to the Cabalist or the Chaldean became a Sephiroth, an Æon, an emanation from the One Supreme. While the author of the religion remained on earth, and while the religion itself was still in its infancy, Jesus was in danger of being degraded into a king of the Jews; his Gospel of becoming the code of a new religious republic. Directly it got beyond the borders of Palestine, and the name of Christ had acquired sanctity and veneration in the Eastern

Gnosticism connects itself with Christianity.

cities, he became a kind of metaphysical impersonation, while the religion lost its purely moral cast, and assumed the character of a speculative theogony. CHAP. V.

Ephesus is the scene of the first collision between Christianity and Orientalism, of which we can trace any authentic record. Ephesus, we have before described as the great emporium of magic arts, and the place where the unwieldy allegory of the East lingered in the bosom of the more elegant Grecian Humanism.* Here the Greek, the Oriental, the Jew, the philosopher, the magician, the follower of John the Baptist, the teacher of Christianity, were no doubt encouraged to settle by the peaceful opulence of the inhabitants, and the constant influx of strangers, under the proudly indifferent protection of the municipal authorities and the Roman government. In Ephesus, according to universal tradition, survived the last of the Apostles, and here the last of the Gospels — some have supposed the latest of the writings of the New Testament, — appeared in the midst of this struggle with the foreign elements of conflicting systems. This Gospel was written, we conceive, not against any peculiar sect or individual, but to arrest the spirit of Orientalism, which was working into the essence of Christianity, destroying its beautiful simplicity, and threatening altogether to change both its design and its effects upon man- Ephesus. St. John. His Gospel.

* The Temple of Diana was the triumph of pure Grecian architecture: but her statue was not that of the divine Huntress, like that twin sister of the Belvidere Apollo in the gallery at Paris; she was the Diana multimamma, the emblematic impersonation of all-productive, all-nutritive, Nature.

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kind. In some points, it necessarily spoke the language, which was common alike, though not precisely with the same meaning, to the Platonism of the West and the Theogonism of the East; but its sense was different and peculiar. It kept the moral and religious, if not altogether distinct from the physical notions, yet clearly and invariably predominant. While it appropriated the well-known and almost universal term, the Logos, or Word of God, to the divine author of Christianity, and even adopted some of the imagery from the hypothesis of conflicting light and darkness; yet it altogether rejected all the wild cosmogonical speculations on the formation of the world; it was silent on that elementary distinction of the Eastern creed, the separation of matter from the etherial mind. The union of the soul with the Deity, though in the writings of John it takes something of a mystic tone, is not the pantheistic absorption into the parent Deity; it is an union by the aspiration of the pious heart, the conjunction by pure and holy love with the Deity, who, to the extatic moral affection of the adorer, is himself pure love. It insists not on abstraction from matter, but from sin, from hatred, from all fierce and corrupting passions; its new life is active as well as meditative; a social principle, which incorporates together all pure and holy men, and conjoins them with their federal head, Christ, the image and representative of the God of Love; it is no principle of isolation in solitary and rapturous meditation; it is a moral not an imaginative purity.

CHAP. V.

Among the opponents to the holy and sublime Christianity of St. John, during his residence at Ephesus, the names of the Nicolaitans and of Cerinthus alone have survived.* Of the tenets of the former, and the author of the doctrine, nothing precise is known; but the indignant language with which they are alluded to in the Sacred Writings implies that they were not merely hostile to the abstract doctrines, but also to the moral effects of the Gospel. Nor does it appear quite clear that the Nicolaitans were a distinct and organised sect.

Nicolaitans.

Cerinthus was the first of whose tenets we have any distinct statement, who, admitting the truth of Christianity, attempted to incorporate with it foreign and Oriental tenets.† Cerinthus was of Jewish descent, and educated in the Judæo-Platonic school of Alexandria.‡ His system was a singular and, apparently, incongrous fusion of Jewish, Christian, and Oriental notions. He did not, like Simon or Menander, invest himself in a sacred and mysterious character, though he pretended to angelic revelations.§ Like all the Ori-

Cerinthus.

* General tradition derived the Nicolaitans from Nicolas, one of the seven deacons. Acts, vi. 5. Eusebius (Eccl. Hist. l. iii. c. 29.) relates a story that Nicolas, accused of being jealous of his beautiful wife, offered her in matrimony to whoever chose to take her. His followers, on this example, founded the tenet of promiscuous concubinage. Wetstein, with whom Michaelis and Rosenmüller are inclined to agree, supposed that Nicolas was a translation of the Hebrew word Bileam, both signifying, in their respective languages, the subduer or the destroyer of the people. Michaelis, Eichhorn, and Storr, suppose, therefore, that it was the name rather of a sect than an individual, and the same with those mentioned 2 Pet. ii. 10. 13. 18.; iii. 3.; Jud. 8. 16. See Rosenmüller on Rev. ii. 6.

† See Mosheim, de Rebus ante C. M. p. 199. Matter, i. 221.

‡ Theodoret, ii. c. 3.

§ Eusebius, E. H. iii. 28., from

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entals, his imagination was haunted with the notion of the malignity of matter; and his object seems to have been to keep both the primal Being and the Christ uninfected with its contagion. The Creator of the material world, therefore, was a secondary being — an angel or angels; as Cerinthus seems to have adhered to the Jewish, and not adopted the Oriental language.* But his national and hereditary reverence for the law withheld him from that bold and hostile step which was taken by most of the other Gnostic sects, to which, no doubt, the general animosity to the Jews in Syria and Egypt concurred, — the identification of the God of the Jewish covenant with the inferior and malignant author of the material creation. He retained, according to one account, his reverence for the rites, the ceremonies, the law, and the prophets, of Judaism†, to which he was probably reconciled by the allegoric interpretations of Philo. The Christ, in his theory, was of a higher order than those secondary and subordinate beings who had presided over the older world. But, with the jealousy of all the Gnostic sects, lest the pure emanation from the Father should be unnecessarily contaminated by too intimate a conjunction with a material and mortal form, he relieved him from the degradation of a human birth, by supposing that the Christ de-

Caius the presbyter, τερατολογίας ἡμῖν ὡς δι' ἀγγέλων αὐτῷ δεδειγμένας ψευδόμενος.

* Epiphanii Hær. viii. 28. According to Irenæus, a virtute quadam valdè separatâ, et distante ab eâ principalitate quæ est super universa et ignorante eum qui est super omnia Deum. Iren. i. 25.

† Inferior angels to those of the law inspired the prophets.

ascended on the man Jesus at his baptism; and from the ignominy of a mortal death, by making him reascend before that crisis, having accomplished his mission of making known "the Unknown Father," the pure and primal Being, of whom the worshippers of the Creator of the material universe, and of the Jehovah of the Jews, were alike ignorant. But the most inconsequential part of the doctrine of Cerinthus was his retention of the Jewish doctrine of the millennium. It must, indeed, have been purified from some of its grosser and more sensual images; for the Christos, the immaterial emanation from the Father, was to preside during its long period of harmony and peace.*

Later Gnostics.

The later Gnostics were bolder, but more consistent, innovators on the simple scheme of Christianity. It was not till the second century that the combination of Orientalism with Christianity was matured into the more perfect Gnosticism. This was, perhaps, at its height from about the year 120 to 140. In all the great cities of the East, in which Christianity had established its most flourishing communities, sprung up this rival, which aspired to a still higher degree of knowledge than was revealed in the Gospel, and boasted that it soared almost as much above the vulgar Christianity as the vulgar Paganism. Antioch, where the first church of the Christians had been opened, beheld the followers

* Cerinthus was considered by some early writers the author of the Apocalypse, because that work appeared to contain his grosser doctrine of the millennial reign of Christ. Dionysius apud Euseb. iii. 282.; vii. 25.

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of Saturninus withdrawing, in a proud assurance of their superiority, from the common brotherhood of believers, and insulating themselves as the gifted possessors of still higher spiritual secrets. Edessa, whose king very early Christian fable had exalted into a personal correspondent with the Saviour, rung with the mystic hymns of Bardesanes; to the countless religious and philosophical factions of Alexandria were added those of Basilides and Valentinus; until a still more unscrupulous and ardent enthusiast, Marcion of Pontus, threw aside in disdain the whole existing religion of the Gospel, remodelled the sacred books, and established himself as the genuine hierophant of the real Christian mysteries.

The primal Deity of Gnosticism.

Gnosticism, though very different from Christianity, was of a sublime and imposing character, as an imaginative creed, and not more unreasonable than the other attempts of human reason to solve the inexplicable secret, the origin of evil. Though variously modified, the systems of the different teachers were essentially the same. The primal Deity remained aloof in his unapproachable majesty; the unspeakable, the ineffable, the nameless, the self-existing.* The Pleroma, the fulness of the Godhead, expanded itself in still outspreading circles, and approached, till it comprehended, the universe. From the Pleroma emanated all spiritual being,

The Pleroma.

* The author of the Apostolic Constitutions asserts, as the first principle of all the early heresies, τὸν μὲν παντοκράτορα Θεὸν βλασφημεῖν, ἄγνωστον δοξάζειν, καὶ μὴ εἶναι Πατέρα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, μηδὲ τοῦ κόσμου δημιουργὸν, ἀλλ' ἄλεκτον, ἄῤῥητον, ἀκατονόμαστον, αὐτογένεθλον. Lib vi. c. 10.

and to him they were to return and mingle again in indissoluble unity. By their entanglement in malign and hostile matter — the source of moral as well as physical evil — all outwardly existing beings had degenerated from their high origin; their redemption from this foreign bondage, their restoration to purity and peace in the bosom of Divinity, the universal harmony of all immaterial existence, thus resolved again into the Pleroma, was the merciful design of the Æon Christ, who had for this purpose invaded and subdued the foreign and hostile provinces of the presiding Energy, or Deity of matter.

The Æon Christ.

In all the Oriental sects, this primary principle, the malignity of matter, haunted the imagination; and to this principle every tenet must be accommodated. The sublimest doctrines of the Old Testament — the creative omnipotence, the sovereignty, the providence of God, as well as the grosser and anthropomorphic images, in which the acts and passions, and even the form of man, are assigned to the Deity, — fell under the same remorseless proscription. It was pollution, it was degradation to the pure and elementary spirit, to mingle with, to approximate, to exercise even the remotest influence over, the material world. The creation of the visible universe was made over, according to all, to a secondary, with most, to a hostile Demiurge. The hereditary reverence which had modified the opinions of Cerinthus, with regard to the Jehovah of his fathers, had no hold on the Syrian and Egyptian speculatists. They fearlessly pursued their system

Malignity of matter.

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to its consequences, and the whole of the Old Testament was abandoned to the inspiration of an inferior and evil dæmon; the Jews were left in exclusive possession of their national Deity, whom the Gnostic Christians disdained to acknowledge as bearing any resemblance to the abstract, remote, and impassive Spirit. To them, the mission of Christ revealed a Deity altogether unknown in the dark ages of a world which was the creation and the domain of an inferior being. They would not, like the philosophising Jews, take refuge in allegory to explain the too material images of the works of the Deity in the act of creation, and his subsequent rest; the intercourse with man in the garden of Eden; the trees of knowledge and of life; the Serpent, and the Fall; they rejected the whole as altogether extraneous to Christianity, belonging to another world, with which the God revealed by Christ had no concern or relation. If they condescended to discuss the later Jewish history, it was merely to confirm their preconceived notions. The apparent investiture of the Jehovah with the state and attributes of a temporal sovereign, the imperfection of the law, the barbarity of the people, the bloody wars in which they were engaged, — in short, whatever in Judaism was irreconcilable with a purely intellectual and morally perfect system, argued its origin from an imperfect and secondary author.

Rejection of the Old Testament.

But some tenets of primitive Christianity came no less into direct collision with the leading principles of Orientalism. The human nature of Jesus

Of some parts of the New.

was too deeply impressed upon all the Gospel history, and perplexed the whole school, as well the precursors of Gnosticism as the more perfect Gnostics. His birth and death bore equal evidence to the unspiritualised materialism of his mortal body. They seized with avidity the distinction between the divine and human nature; but the Christ, the Æon, which emanated from the pure and primal Deity, as yet unknown in the world of the inferior creator, must be relieved as far as possible from the degrading and contaminating association with the mortal Jesus. The simpler hypothesis of the union of the two natures, mingled up, too closely, according to their views, the ill-assorted companions. The human birth of Jesus, though guarded by the virginity of his mother, was still offensive to their subtler and more fastidious purity. The Christ, therefore, the Emanation from the Pleroma, descended upon the man Jesus at his baptism. The death of Jesus was a still more serious cause of embarrassment. They seem never to have entertained the notion of an expiatory sacrifice; and the connection of the ethereal mind with the pains and sufferings of a carnal body, was altogether repulsive to their strongest prejudices. Before the death, therefore, of Jesus, the Christ had broken off his temporary association with the perishable body of Jesus, and surrendered it to the impotent resentment of Pilate and of the Jews; or, according to the theory of the Docetæ, adopted by almost all the Gnostic sects, the whole union with the material human form was an illusion upon

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the senses of men; it was but an apparent human being, an impassive phantom, which *seemed* to undergo all the insults and the agony of the cross.

Such were the general tenets of the Gnostic sects, emanating from one simple principle. But the details of their cosmogony, their philosophy, and their religion, were infinitely modified by local circumstances, by the more or less fanciful genius of their founders, and by the stronger infusion of the different elements of Platonism, Kabalism, or that which, in its stricter sense, may be called Orientalism. The number of circles, or emanations, or procreations, which intervened between the spiritual and the material world; the nature and the rank of the Creator of that material world; his more or less close identification with the Jehovah of Judaism; the degree of malignity which they attributed to the latter; the office and the nature of the Christos, — these were open points, upon which they admitted or, at least, assumed, the utmost latitude.

Saturninus.

The earliest of the more distinguished Gnostics is Saturninus, who is represented as a pupil of Menander, the successor of Simon Magus.* But this Samaritan sect was always in direct hostility with Christianity, while Saturninus departed less from the Christian system than most of the wilder and more imaginative teachers of Gnosticism. The strength of the Christian party in Antioch may in some degree

* On Saturninus, see Irenæus, i. 22.; Euseb. iv. 7.; Epiphan. Hær. 23.; Theodoret, Hær. Fab. lib. iii.; Tertullian de Animâ, 23.; de Præscrip. cont. Hær. c. 46. Of the moderns, Mosheim, p. 336.; Matter, i. 276.

have overawed and restrained the aberrations of his fancy. Saturninus did not altogether exclude the primal spiritual Being from all concern or interest in the material world. For the Creator of the visible universe, he assumed the seven great angels, which the later Jews had probably borrowed, though with different powers, from the seven Amschaspands of Zoroastrianism. Neither were these angels essentially evil, nor was the domain on which they exercised their creative power altogether surrendered to the malignity of matter; it was a kind of debateable ground between the powers of evil and of good. The historian of Gnosticism has remarked the singular beauty of the fiction regarding the creation of man." "The angels tried their utmost efforts to form man; but there arose under their creative influence only 'a worm creeping upon the earth.' God, condescending to interpose, sent down his Spirit, which breathed into the reptile the living soul of man." It is not quite easy to connect with this view of the origin of man the tenets of Saturninus, that the human kind was divided into two distinct races, the good and the bad. Whether the latter became so from receiving a feebler and less influential portion of the divine Spirit, or whether they were a subsequent creation of Satan, who assumes the station of the Ahriman of the Persian system.* But the descent of Christ was

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* The latter opinion is that of Mosheim. M. Matter, on the contrary, says, — "Satan n'a pourtant pas créé les hommes, et les à trouvé tout faits: il s'en est emparé; c'est là sa sphère d'activité et la limite de sa puissance. p. 285.

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to separate finally these two conflicting races. He was to rescue the good from the predominant power of the wicked; to destroy the kingdom of the spirits of evil, who, emanating in countless numbers from Satan their chief, waged a fatal war against the good; and to elevate them far above the power of the chief of the angels, the God of the Jews, for whose imperfect laws were to be substituted the purifying principles of Asceticism, by which the children of light, were re-united to the source and origin of light. The Christ himself was the Supreme Power of God, immaterial, incorporeal, formless, but assuming the *semblance* of man; and his followers were, as far as possible, to detach themselves from their corporeal bondage, and assimilate themselves to his spiritual being. Marriage was the invention of Satan and his evil spirits, or at best, of the great angel, the God of the Jews, in order to continue the impure generation. The elect were to abstain from propagating a race of darkness and imperfection. Whether Saturninus, with the Essenes, maintained this total abstinence as the especial privilege of the higher class of his followers, and permitted to the less perfect the continuation of their kind, or whether he abandoned altogether this perilous and degrading office to the wicked, his system appears incomplete, as it seems to yield up as desperate the greater part of the human race; to perpetuate the dominion of evil; and to want the general and final absorption of all existence into the purity and happiness of the primal Being.

Alexandria, the centre, as it were, of the speculative and intellectual activity of the Roman world, to which ancient Egypt, Asia, Palestine, and Greece, furnished the mingled population of her streets, and the conflicting opinions of her schools, gave birth to the two succeeding, and most widely disseminated sects of Gnosticism, those of Basilides and Valentinus.

Alexandria.

Basilides was a Syrian by birth, and by some is supposed to have been a scholar of Menander, at the same time with Saturninus. He claimed, however, Glaucias, a disciple of St. Peter, as his original teacher; and his doctrines assumed the boastful title of the Secret Traditions of the great Apostle. He also had some ancient prophecies, those of Cham and Barkaph*, peculiar to his sect. According to another authority, he was a Persian; but this may have originated from the Zoroastrian cast of his primary tenets.† From the Zendavesta, Basilides drew the eternal hostility of mind and matter, of light and darkness; but the Zoroastrian doctrine seems to have accommodated itself to the kindred systems of Egypt. In fact, the Gnosticism of Basilides appears to have been a fusion of the ancient sacerdotal religion of Egypt with the angelic and dæmoniac theory of Zoroaster. Basilides did not, it seems, maintain his one abstract unapproachable Deity far above the rest of the universe, but con-

Basilides.

* Irenæus differs in his view of the Basilidian theory, from the remains of the Basilidian books appealed to by Clement of Alexandria, Strom. vi. p. 375. 795.; Theodoret, Hæret. Fabul. 1, 2.; Euseb. E. H. iv. 7. Basilides published twenty-four volumes of exegetica, or interpretations of his doctrines.

† Clemens, Stromata vi. 642. Euseb. H. E. iv. 7.

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nected him, by a long and insensible gradation of intellectual developments or manifestations, with the visible and material world. From the Father proceeded seven beings, who together with him made up an ogdoad; constituted the first scale of intellectual beings, and inhabited the highest heaven, the purest intellectual sphere. According to their names — Mind, Reason, Intelligence (Φρονησις), Wisdom, Power, Justice, and Peace, — they are merely, in our language, the attributes of the Deity, impersonated in this system.

The number of these primary Æons is the same as the Persian system of the Deity and the seven Amschaspands, and the Sephiroth of the Kabbala, and, probably, as far as that abstruse subject is known, of the ancient Egyptian theology.*

The seven primary effluxes of the Deity went on producing and multiplying, each forming its own realm or sphere, till they reached the number of 365.† The total number formed the mystical Abraxas‡, the legend which is found on so many

* See Matter, vol. ii. p. 5—37.

† It is difficult to suppose that this number, either as originally borrowed from the Egyptian theology, or as invented by Basilides, had not some astronomical reference.

‡ Irenæus, i. 23. See in M. Matter, ii. 49. 54, the countless interpretations of this mysterious word. We might add others to those collected by his industry. M. Matter adopts, though with some doubt, the opinion of M. Bellerman and M. Munter. Le premier de ces écrivains explique le mot d'Abraxas par le kopte, qui est incontestablement à l'ancienne langue d'Egypte ce que la grec moderne est au langage de l'ancienne Gréce. La syllable sadsch, que les Grecs ont dû convertir en σαξ, ou σας, ou σαζ, n'ayant pu exprimer la dernière lettre de cette syllable, que par les lettres X, Σ, ou Z, signifierait parole, et abrak *béni, saint, adorable*, en sorte que le mot d'Abraxas tout entier, offrirait le sens de *parole sacrée*. M. Munter ne s'éloigne de cette interprétation, que pour les syllables abrak qu'il prend pour le mot kopte "berra" *nouveau*, ce qui donne à l'ensemble

of the ancient gems, the greater part of which are of Gnostic origin; though as much of this theory was from the doctrines of ancient Egypt, not only the mode of expressing their tenets by symbolic inscriptions, but even the inscription itself, may be originally Egyptian.* The lowest of these worlds bordered on the realm of matter. The first confusion and invasion of the hostile elements took place. At length the chief angel of this sphere, on the verge of intellectual being, was seized with a desire of reducing the confused mass to order. With his assistant angels, he became the Creator. Though the form was of a higher origin, it was according to the idea of Wisdom, who, with the Deity, formed part of the first and highest ogdoad. Basilides professed the most profound reverence for divine Providence; and in Alexandria, the God of the Jews, softened off, as it were, and harmonised to the philosophic sentiment by the school of Philo, was looked upon in a less hostile light than by the Syrian and Asiatic school. The East lent its system of guardian angels, and the assistant angels of the Demiurge were the spiritual rulers of the nations, while the Creator himself was that of the Jews. Man was formed of a triple nature. His corporeal form of brute and malignant matter; his animal soul, the Psychic principle, which he received from the Demiurge; the higher and purer spirit, with

le sens de *parole nouveau*. Matter, ii. 40.

* See, in the supplement to M. Matter's work, a very curious collection of these Egyptian and Egypto-Grecian medals; and a work of Dr. Walsh on these coins. Compare, likewise, Reuven's Lettres à M. Letronne, particularly p. 23.

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which he was endowed from a loftier region. This pure and etherial spirit was to be emancipated from its impure companionship: and Egypt, or rather, the whole East, lent the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, in order to carry this stranger upon earth through the gradations of successive purification, till it was readmitted to its parent heaven.

Basilides, in the Christian doctrine which he interwove with this imaginative theory, followed the usual Gnostic course.* The Christ, the first Æon of the Deity, descended on the man Jesus at his baptism; but, by a peculiar tenet of their own, the Basilidians rescued even the man Jesus from the degrading sufferings of the cross. Simon the Cyrenian was changed into the form of Jesus; on him the enemies of the crucified wasted their wrath, while Jesus stood aloof in the form of Simon, and mocked their impotent malice. Their moral perceptions must have been singularly blinded by their passion for their favourite tenet, not to discern how much they lowered their Saviour by making him thus render up an innocent victim as his own substitute.

Valentinus.

Valentinus appears to have been considered the most formidable and dangerous of this school of Gnostics.† He was twice excommunicated, and twice received again into the bosom of the church.

* Irenæus, i. 29., compared with the other authors cited above.

† Irenæus, Hær. v. Clemens., Alex. Strom. Origen, de Princip. contra Celsum. The author of the Didascalia Orientalis, at the end of the works of Clement of Alexandria. Tertullian adversus Valentin. Theodoret, Fab. Hær. i. 7. Epiphanius, Hær. 31.

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He did not confine his dangerous opinions to the school of Alexandria; he introduced the wild Oriental speculations into the more peaceful West; taught at Rome; and a third time being expelled from the Christian society, retired to Cyprus, an island where the Jews were formerly numerous, till the fatal insurrection in the time of Hadrian; and where probably the Oriental philosophy might not find an unwelcome reception, on the border, as it were, of Europe and Asia.*

Valentinus annihilated the complexity of pre-existing heavens, which, perhaps, connected the system of Basilides with that of ancient Egypt, and did not interpose the same infinite number of gradations between the primal Deity and the material world. He descended much more rapidly into the sphere of Christian images and Christian language, or rather, he carried up many of the Christian notions and terms, and enshrined them in the Pleroma, the region of spiritual and inaccessible light. The fundamental tenet of Orientalism, the incomprehensibility of the Great Supreme, was the essential principle of his system, and was represented in terms pregnant with mysterious sublimity. The first Father was called Bythos, the Abyss, the Depth, the Unfathomable, who dwelt alone in inscrutable and ineffable height, with his own first Conception, his Ennoia, who bore the emphatic and awful name of Silence. The first development or self-manifestation was Mind (Nous), whose ap-

* Tertull. advers. Valentin., c. 4. Epiphan. Massuet. (Diss. in Iren. p. x. 14.) doubts this part of the history of Valentinus.

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propriate consort was Aletheia or Truth. These formed the first great quaternion, the highest scale of being. From Mind and Truth proceeded the Word and Life (Logos and Zoe); their manifestations were Man and the Church, Anthropos and Ecclesia, and so the first ogdoad was complete. From the Word and Life proceeded ten more Æons; but these seem, from their names, rather qualities of the Supreme; at least the five masculine names, for the feminine appear to imply some departure from the pure elementary and unimpassioned nature of the primal Parent. The males are—Buthios, profound, with his consort Mixis, conjunction; Ageratos, that grows not old, with Henosis or union; Autophyes, self-subsistent, with Hedone, pleasure; Akinetos, motionless, with Syncrasis, commixture; the Only Begotten and the Blessed. The offspring of Man and the Church were twelve, and in the females we seem to trace the shadowy prototypes of the Christian graces: — the Paraclete and Faith; the Paternal and Hope; the Maternal and Charity; the Ever-intelligent and Prudence; Ecclesiasticos (a term apparently expressive of church union) and Blessedness; Will and Wisdom (Theletos and Sophia).

These thirty Æons dwelt alone within the sacred and inviolable circle of the Pleroma: they were all, in one sense, manifestations of the Deity, all purely intellectual, an universe apart. But the peace of this metaphysical hierarchy was disturbed, and here we are presented with a noble allegory, which, as it were, brings these abstract conceptions within the reach of human sympathy.

The last of the dodecarchy which sprung from Man and the Church was Sophia or Wisdom. Without intercourse with her consort Will, Wisdom was seized with an irresistible passion for that knowledge and intimate union with the primal Father, the unfathomable, which was the sole privilege of the first-born, Mind. She would comprehend the incomprehensible: love was the pretext, but temerity the motive. Pressing onward under this strong impulse, she would have reached the remote sanctuary, and would finally have been absorbed into the primal Essence, had she not encountered Horus (the impersonated boundary between knowledge and the Deity). At the persuasion of this "limitary cherub" (to borrow Milton's words), she acknowledged the incomprehensibility of the Father, returned in humble acquiescence to her lowlier sphere, and allayed the passion begot of wonder. But the harmony of the intellectual world was destroyed; a redemption, a restoration, was necessary; and (for now Valentinus must incorporate the Christian system into his own) from the first Æon, the divine Mind, proceeded Christ and the Holy Ghost. Christ communicated to the listening Æons the mystery of the imperishable nature of the Father, and their own procession from him; the delighted Æons commemorated the restoration of the holy peace, by each contributing his most splendid gift to form Jesus, encircled with his choir of angels.

Valentinus did not descend immediately from his domain of metaphysical abstraction; he interposed an intermediate sphere between that and the

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material world. The desire or passion of Sophia, impersonated, became an inferior Wisdom; she was an outcast from the Pleroma, and lay floating in the dim and formless chaos without. The Christos in mercy gave her form and substance; she preserved, as it were, some fragrance of immortality. Her passion was still strong for higher things, for the light which she could not apprehend; and she incessantly attempted to enter the forbidden circle of the Pleroma, but was again arrested by Horus, who uttered the mystic name of Jao. Sadly she returned to the floating elements of inferior being; she was surrendered to Passion, and with his assistance produced the material world. The tears which she shed, at the thought of her outcast condition, formed the humid element; her smiles, when she thought of the region of glory, the light; her fears and her sorrows, the grosser elements. Christ descended no more to her assistance, but sent Jesus, the Paraclete, the Saviour, with his angels; and with his aid, all substance was divided into material, animal, and spiritual. The spiritual, however, altogether emanated from the light of her divine assistant; the first formation of the animal (the Psychic) was the Demiurge, the Creator, the Saviour, the Father, the king of all that was consubstantial with himself, and finally, the material, of which he was only the Demiurge or Creator. Thus were formed the seven intermediate spheres, of which the Demiurge and his assistant angels (the seven again of the Persian system), with herself, made up a second ogdoad,—the image and feeble

reflection of the former; Wisdom representing the primal Parent; the Demiurge the divine Mind, though he was ignorant of his mother, more ignorant than Satan himself; the other sideral angels, the rest of the Æons. By the Demiurge the lower world was formed. Mankind consisted of three classes: the spiritual, who are enlightened with the divine ray from Jesus; the animal or psychic, the offspring and kindred of the Demiurge; the material, the slaves and associates of Satan, the prince of the material world. They were represented, as it were, by Seth, Abel, and Cain. This organisation or distribution of mankind harmonised with tolerable facility with the Christian scheme. But by multiplying his spiritual beings, Valentinus embarassed himself in the work of redemption or restoration of this lower and still degenerating world. With him, it was the Christos, or rather a faint image and reflection (for each of his intelligences multiplied themselves by this reflection of their being), who passed through the material form of the Virgin, like water through a tube. It was Jesus who descended upon the Saviour at his baptism, in the shape of the dove; and Valentinus admitted the common fantastic theory, with regard to the death of Jesus. At the final consummation, the latent fire would burst out (here Valentinus admitted the common theory of Zoroastrianism and Christianity) and consume the very scoria of matter; the material men, with their prince, would utterly perish in the conflagration. Those of the animal, the Psychic, purified by the divine ray imparted by the Redeemer, would, with their parent,

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the Demiurge, occupy the intermediate realm, there were the just men made perfect, while the great mother Sophia, would at length be admitted into the Pleroma or intellectual sphere.

Bardesanes.

Gnosticism was pure poetry, and Bardesanes was the poet of Gnosticism.* For above two centuries, the hymns of this remarkable man, and those of his son Harmonius, enchanted the ears of the Syrian Christians, till they were expelled by the mere orthodox raptures of Ephraem, the Syrian. Among the most remarkable circumstances relating to Bardesanes, who lived at the court of Abgar, king of Edessa, was his inquiry into the doctrines of the ancient Gymnosophists of India, which thus connected, as it were, the remotest East with the great family of religious speculatists; yet the theory of Bardesanes was more nearly allied to the Persian or the Chaldean; and the language of his poetry was in that fervent and amatory strain which borrows the warmest metaphors of human passion, to kindle the soul to divine love.†

Bardesanes deserved the glory, though he did not suffer the pains, of martyrdom. Pressed by the philosopher Apollonius, in the name of his master, the Emperor Verus, to deny Christianity, he replied, "I fear not death, which I shall not escape by yielding to the wishes of the Emperor." Bardesanes had opposed with vigorous hostility the system of

* Valentinus, accordian to Tertullian, wrote psalms (de Carne Christi, c. 20.); his disciple Marcus explained his system in verse, and introduced the Æons as speaking. Compare Hahn. p. 26. Bardesanes wrote 150 psalms, the number of those of David.

† Theodoret, Hæret. Fab. 209.

Marcion*, he afterwards appears to have seceded or, outwardly conforming, to have aspired in private to become the head of another Gnostic sect, which, in contradistinction to those of Saturninus and Valentinus, may be called the Mesopotamian or Babylonian. With him, the primal Deity dwelt alone with his consort, his primary thought or conception. Their first offsprings, Æons, or emanations, were Christ and the Holy Ghost, who, in his system was feminine, and nearly allied to the Sophia, or Wisdom, of other theories; the four elements,—the dry earth, and the water, the fire, and the air,—who make up the celestial ogdoad. The Son and his partner, the Spirit or Wisdom, with the assistance of the elements, made the worlds, which they surrendered to the government of the seven planetary spirits and the sun and moon, the visible types of the primal union. Probably these, as in the other systems, made the second ogdoad; and these, with other astral influences, borrowed from the Tsabaism of the region, the twelve signs of the zodiac, and the thirty-six Decani, as he called the rulers of the 360 days, governed the world of man. And here Bardesanes became implicated with the eternal dispute about destiny and freewill, on which he wrote a separate treatise, and which entered into and coloured all his speculations.† But the Wisdom which was the consort of

* According to Eusebius, E. H. v. 38., Bardesanes approached much nearer to orthodoxy, though he still "bore some tokens of the sable streams."

† He seems to have had an esoteric and an exoteric doctrine. Hahn, p. 22., on the authority of St. Ephrem. Compare Hahn, Bardesanes Gnosticus Syrorum primus Hymnologus.

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the Son was of an inferior nature to that which dwelt with the Father. She was the Sophia Achamoth, and, faithless to her spiritual partner, she had taken delight in assisting the Demiurge in the creation of the visible world; but in all her wanderings and estrangement, she felt a constant and empassioned desire for perfect reunion with her first consort. He assisted her in her course of purification; revealed to her his more perfect light, on which she gazed with reanimating love; and the second wedding of these long estranged powers, in the presence of the parent Deity, and all the Æons and angels, formed the subject of one of his most ardent and rapturous hymns. With her, arose into the Pleroma those souls which partook of her celestial nature, and are rescued, by the descent of the Christ, according to the usual Gnostic theory, from their imprisonment in the world of matter.

Yet all these theorists preserved some decent show of respect for the Christian faith, and aimed at an amicable reconciliation between their own wild theories and the simpler Gospel. It is not improbable that most of their leaders were actuated by the ambition of uniting the higher and more intellectual votaries of the older Paganism with the Christian community; the one by an accommodation with the Egyptian, the others, with the Syrian or Chaldean; as, in later times, the Alexandrian school, with the Grecian or Platonic Paganism; and expected to conciliate all who would not scruple to engraft the few tenets of Christianity, which they reserved inviolate, upon their former belief. They aspired

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to retain all that was dazzling, vast, and imaginative in the cosmogonical systems of the East, and rejected all that was humiliating or offensive to the common sentiment in Christianity. The Jewish character of the Messiah gave way to a purely immaterial notion of a celestial Redeemer; the painful realities of his life and death were softened off into fantastic appearances; they yet adopted as much of the Christian language as they could mould to their views, and even disguised or mitigated their contempt or animosity to Judaism. But Marcion of Pontus* disclaimed all these conciliatory and temporising measures, either with Pagan, Jew, or evangelic Christian.† With Marcion, all was hard, cold, implacable antagonism. At once a severe rationalist and a strong enthusiast, Marcion pressed the leading doctrine of the malignity of matter to its extreme speculative and practical consequences. His Creator, his providential Governor, the God of the Jews,—weak, imperfect, enthralled in matter, —was the opposite to the true God: the only virtue of men was the most rigid and painful abstinence. His doctrine proscribed all animal food but fish; it surpassed the most austere of the other Christian communities in its proscription of the amusements and pleasures of life; it rejected marriage, from hostility to the Demiurge, whose kingdom it would not increase by peopling it with new beings enslaved to matter, to glut death with food.‡ The funda-

Marcion of Pontus.

* Marcion was son of the Bishop of Sinope.

† On Marcion, see chiefly the five books of Tertullian adv. Marcenes; the Historian of Heresies, Irenæus, i. 27.; Epiphanius, 42.; Theodoret, i. 24.; Origen contra Cels.; Clem. Alex. iii. 425. St. Ephrem, Orat. 14. p. 468.

‡ ᾧ δὴ λογῷ μὴ βουλόμενοι τὸν

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mental principle of Marcion's doctrine was unfolded in his Antitheses, the Contrasts, in which he arrayed against each other the Supreme God and the Demiurge, the God of the Jews, the Old and New Testament, the Law and the Gospel.* The one was perfect, pure, beneficent, passionless; the other, though not unjust by nature, infected by matter, — subject to all the passions of man, — cruel, changeable; the New Testament, especially, as remodelled by Marcion, was holy, wise, amiable; the Old Testament, the Law, barbarous, inhuman, contradictory, and detestable. On the plundering of the Egyptians, on the massacre of the Canaanites, on every metaphor which ascribed the actions and sentiments of men to the Deity, Marcion enlarged with contemptuous superiority, and contrasted it with the tone of the Gospel. It was to rescue mankind from the tyranny of this inferior and hostile deity, that the Supreme manifested himself in Jesus Christ. This manifestation took place by his sudden appearance in the synagogue in Capernaum; for Marcion swept away with remorseless hand all the earlier incidents in the Gospels. But the Messiah which was revealed in Christ was directly the opposite to that announced by the Prophets of the Jews, and of their God. He made no conquests; he was not the Immanuel; he was not the son of David; he came not

κοσμὸν τὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ Δημιούργου γενομενὸν συμπληροῦν, ἀπέχεσθαι γάμου βούλονται. — Clem. Alex. Strom. iii. 3. μηδὲ ἀντεισάγειν τῷ κοσμῷ δυστυχήσοντας ἑτέρους, μηδὲ ἐπιχορηγεῖν τῷ θανατῷ τρόφην. Ch. vi.

* Marcion is accused by Rhodon apud Euseb. H. E. v. 13., of introducing two principles, — the Zoroastrian theory.

to restore the temporal kingdom of Israel. His doctrines were equally opposed: he demanded not an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth; but where one smote the right cheek, to turn the other. He demanded no sacrifices but that of the pure heart; he enjoined not the sensual and indecent practice of multiplying the species; he proscribed marriage. The God of the Jews, trembling for his authority, armed himself against the celestial invader of his territory; he succeeded, in the *seeming* execution of Christ upon the cross, who, by his death, rescued the souls of the true believers from the bondage of the law; descended to the lower regions, where he rescued, not the pious and holy patriarchs, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Jacob, Moses, David, or Solomon, —these were the adherents of the Demiurge or material creator, — but his implacable enemies, such as Cain and Esau. After the ascension of the Redeemer to heaven, the God of the Jews was to restore his subjects to their native land; and his temporal reign was to commence over his faithful but inferior subjects.

The Gospel of Marcion was that of St. Luke, adapted, by many omissions, and some alterations, to his theory. Every allusion to, every metaphor from, marriage was carefully erased, and every passage amended or rejected which could in any way implicate the pure deity with the material world.*

* This Gospel has been put together, according to the various authorities, especially of Tertullian, by M. Hahn. It is reprinted in the Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti, by Thilo, of which one volume only has appeared. Among the remarkable alterations of the Gospels which most strongly characterise his system, was that of the text so beautifully descriptive of the providence of God,—which

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Varieties of Gnosticism.

These were the chief of the Gnostic sects; but they spread out into almost infinitely diversified subdivisions, distinguished by some peculiar tenet or usage. The Carpocratians were avowed Eclectics; they worshipped, as benefactors of the human race, the images of Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Jesus Christ, as well as that of their own founder. By this school were received, possibly were invented, many of the astrologic or theurgic books attributed to Zoroaster and other ancient sages. The Jewish Scriptures were the works of inferior angels; they received only the Gospel of St. Matthew. The supreme, unknown, uncreated Deity, was the Monad; the visible world was the creation, the domain of inferior beings. But their system was much simpler, and, in some respects, rejecting generally the system of Æons or Emanations, approached much nearer to Christianity than most of the other Gnostics. The contest of Jesus Christ, who was the son of Joseph, according to their system, was a purely moral one. It revived the Oriental notion of the pre-existence of the soul: that of Jesus had a clearer and more distinct reminiscence of the original knowledge (the Gnosis), and wisdom of their celestial state; and by communicating these notions to mankind, elevated them to the same superiority over the mundane deities. This perfection consisted in faith and charity, perhaps likewise in

"maketh his sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." Matt. v. 45. The sun and the rain, those material elements, were the slaves only of the God of matter: the Supreme Deity might not defile himself with the administration of their blessings. Tertull. adv. Marc. iv. 17.

the extatic contemplation of the Monad. Every thing except faith and charity, — all good works, all observances of human laws, which were established by mundane authority, — were exterior, and more than indifferent. Hence, they were accused of recommending a community of property, and of women, — inferences which would be drawn from their avowed contempt for all human laws. They were accused, probably without justice, of following out these speculative opinions into practice. Of all heretics, none have borne a worse name than the followers of Carpocrates and his son and successor, Epiphanes.*

The Ophites † are, perhaps, the most perplexing of all these sects. It is difficult to ascertain whether the Serpent from which they took or received their name was a good or an evil spirit, — the Agathodæmon of the Egyptian mythology, or the Serpent of the Jewish and other Oriental schemes. With them, a quaternion seems to have issued from the primal Being, the Abyss, who dwelt alone with his Ennoia, or Thought. These were Christ and Sophia Achamoth, the Spirit and Chaos. The former of each

* I think that we may collect from Clement of Alexandria, that the community of women, in the Carpocratian system, was that of Plato. Clement insinuates that it was carried into practice. Strom. iii. c. 2. According to Clement, the different sects, or sects of sects, justified their immoralities on different pleas. Some, the Prodician Gnostics, considered public prostitution a mystic communion; others, that all children of the primary or good Deity might exercise their regal privilege of acting as they pleased; some, the Antitactæ, thought it right to break the seventh commandment, because it was uttered by the evil Demiurge. But these were obscure sects, and possibly their adversaries drew these conclusions for them from their doctrines. Strom. l. iii.

† Mosheim, p. 399., who wrote a particular dissertation on the Ophitæ, of which he distinguished two sects, a Jewish and a Christian.

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of these powers was perfect, the latter imperfect. Sophia Achamoth, departing from the primal source of purity, formed Ialdabaoth, the Prince of Darkness, the Demiurge, an inferior, but not directly malignant, being — the Satan, or Samaël, or Michael. The tutelar angel of the Jews was Ophis, the Serpent — a reflection of Ialdabaoth. With others, the Serpent was the symbol of Christ himself *; and hence the profound abhorrence with which this obscure sect was beheld by the more orthodox Christians. In other respects, their opinions appear to have approximated more nearly to the common Gnostic form. At the intercession of Sophia, Christ descended on the man Jesus, to rescue the souls of men from the fury of the Demiurge, who had imprisoned them in matter: they ascended through the realm of the seven planetary angels.

Such, in its leading branches, was the Gnosticism of the East, which rivalled the more genuine Christianity, if not in the number of its converts, in the activity with which it was disseminated, especially among the higher and more opulent; and, in its lofty pretensions, claimed a superiority over the humbler Christianity of the vulgar. But for this very reason, Gnosticism, in itself, was diametrically opposite to the true Christian spirit: instead of being popular and universal, it was select and exclusive. It was another, in one respect a higher, form of Judaism, inasmuch as it did not rest its exclusiveness on the title of birth, but on especial knowledge (gnosis),

Gnosticism not popular.

* M. Matter conjectures that they had derived the notion of the beneficent serpent, the emblem or symbol of Christ, from the brazen serpent in the wilderness. Perhaps it was the Egyptian Agatho-dæmon.

vouchsafed only to the enlightened and inwardly designated few. It was the establishment of the Christians as a kind of religious privileged order, a theophilosophic aristocracy, whose esoteric doctrines soared far above the grasp and comprehension of the vulgar.* It was a philosophy rather than a religion; at least the philosophic or speculative part would soon have predominated over the spiritual. They affected a profound and awful mystery; they admitted their disciples, in general, by slow and regular gradations. Gnostic Christianity, therefore, might have been a formidable antagonist to the prevailing philosophy of the times, but it would never have extirpated an ancient and deeply-rooted religion; it might have drained the schools of their hearers, but it never would have changed the temples into solitudes. It would have affected only the surface of society: it did not begin to work upward from its depths, nor penetrated to that strong under-current of popular feeling and opinion which alone operates a profound and lasting change in the moral sentiments of mankind.

Conciliatory towards Paganism.

With regard to Paganism, the Gnostics are accused of a compromising and conciliatory spirit, totally alien to that of primitive Christianity. They affected the haughty indifference of the philosophers of their own day, or the Brahmins of India, to the vulgar idolatry; scrupled not a contemptuous conformity with the established worship;

* Tertullian taunts the Valentinians—"nihil magis curant quam occultare quid prædicant, si tamen prædicant qui occultant." Tert. adv. Valent.

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attended the rites and the festivals of the Heathen; partook of meats offered in sacrifice, and, secure in their own intellectual or spiritual purity, conceived that no stain could cleave to their uninfected spirits from this which, to most Christians, appeared a treasonable surrender of the vital principles of the faith.

This criminal compliance of the Gnostics, no doubt, countenanced and darkened those charges of unbridled licentiousness of manners with which they are almost indiscriminately assailed by the early fathers. Those dark and incredible accusations of midnight meetings, where all the restraints of shame and of nature were thrown off, which Pagan hostility brought against the general body of the Christians, were reiterated by the Christians against these sects, whose principles were those of the sternest and most rigid austerity. They are accused of openly preaching the indifference of human action. The material nature of man was so essentially evil and malignant, that there was no necessity, as there could be no advantage, in attempting to correct its inveterate propensities. While, therefore, it might pursue, uncontrolled, its own innate and inalienable propensities, the serene and uncontaminated spirit of those, at least, who were enlightened by the divine ray, might remain aloof, either unconscious, or, at least, unparticipant, in the aberrations of its grovelling consort. Such general charges, it is equally unjust to believe, and impossible to refute. The dreamy indolence of mysticism is not unlikely to degenerate into voluptuous excess. The excitement of mental

has often a strong effect on bodily, emotion. The party of the Gnostics may have contained many whose passions were too strong for their principles, or who may have made their principles the slaves of their passions; but Christian charity and sober historical criticism concur in rejecting these general accusations. The Gnostics were, in general, imaginative, rather than practical, fanatics; they indulged a mental, rather than corporeal, license. The Carpocratians have been exposed to the most obloquy. But, even in their case, the charitable doubts of dispassionate historical criticism are justified by those of an ancient writer, who declares his disbelief of any irreligious, lawless, or forbidden practices among these sectaries.*

It was the reaction, as it were, of Gnosticism, that produced the last important modification of Christianity, during the second century, the Montanism of Phrygia. But we have, at present, proceeded in our relation of the contest between Orientalism and Christianity so far beyond the period to which we conducted the contest with Paganism, that we reascend at once to the commencement of the second century. Montanism, however thus remotely connected with Gnosticism, stands alone and independent as a new aberration from the primitive Christianity, and will demand our attention in its influence upon one of the most distinguished and effective of the early Christian writers.

* Καὶ εἰ μὲν πράσσεται παρ' αὐτοῖς ἃ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἂν πιστεύσαιμι. Irenæus, τὰ ἄθεα, καὶ ἄθεσμα, καὶ ἀπειρημένα, i. 24.

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTIANITY DURING THE PROSPEROUS PERIOD OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE.

Roman Emperors at the commencement of the second century.

WITH the second century of Christianity commenced the reign of another race of emperors. Trajan, Hadrian, and the Antonines, were men of larger minds, more capable of embracing the vast empire, and of taking a wide and comprehensive survey of the interests, the manners, and the opinions of the various orders and races of men which reposed under the shadow of the Roman sway. They were not, as the first Cæsars, monarchs of Rome, governing the other parts of the world as dependent provinces; but sovereigns of the Western World, which had gradually coalesced into one majestic and harmonious system. Under the military dominion of Trajan, the empire appeared to reassume the strength and enterprise of the conquering republic: he had invested the whole frontier with a defence more solid and durable than the strongest line of fortresses, or the most impregnable wall—the terror of the Roman arms, and the awe of Roman discipline. If the more prudent Hadrian withdrew the advanced boundaries of the empire, it seemed in the consciousness of strength, disdaining the occupation of wild and savage districts, which rather belonged to the yet

unreclaimed realm of barbarism, than were fit to be incorporated in the dominion of civilisation. Even in the East, the Euphrates appeared to be a boundary traced by nature for the dominion of Rome. Hadrian was the first emperor who directed his attention to the general internal affairs of the whole population of the empire. The spirit of jurisprudence prevailed during the reign of the Antonines; and the main object of the ruling powers seemed to be the uniting under one general system of law the various members of the great political confederacy. Thus, each contributed to the apparent union and durability of the social edifice. This period has been considered by many able writers, a kind of golden age of human happiness.* What, then, was the effect of Christianity on the general character of the times, and how far were the Christian communities excluded from the general felicity?

It was impossible that the rapid and universal progress of a new religion should escape the notice of minds so occupied with the internal, as well as the external affairs of the whole empire. But it so happened (the Christian will admire in this singular concurrence of circumstances the overruling power of a beneficent Deity), that the moderation and humanity of the emperors stepped in, as it were, to allay at this particular crisis the dangers of a general and inevitable collision with the temporal government. Christianity itself was just in

* This theory is most ably developed by Hegewisch. See the Translation of his Essay, by M. Solvet. Paris, 1834.

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Characters of the Emperors favourable to the advancement of Christianity.

that state of advancement in which, though it had begun to threaten, and even to make most alarming encroachments on the established Polytheism, it had not so completely divided the whole race of mankind, as to force the heads of the Polytheistic party, the official conservators of the existing order of things, to take violent and decisive measures for its suppression. The temples, though, perhaps, becoming less crowded, were in few places deserted; the alarm, though, perhaps, in many towns it was deeply brooding in the minds of the priesthood, and of those connected by zeal or by interest with the maintenance of Paganism, was not so profound or so general, as imperiously to require the interposition of the civil authorities. The milder or more indifferent character of the Emperor had free scope to mitigate or to arrest the arm of persecution. The danger was not so pressing but that it might be averted: that which had arisen thus suddenly and unexpectedly (so little were the wisest probably aware of the real nature of the revolution working in the minds of men) might die away with as much rapidity. Under an emperor, indeed, who should have united the vigour of a Trajan and the political forethought of a Hadrian with the sanguinary relentlessness of a Nero, Christianity would have had to pass a tremendous ordeal. Now, however, the collision of the new religion with the civil power was only occasional, and, as it were, fortuitous; and in these occasional conflicts with the ruling powers, we constantly appear to trace the character of the reigning sovereign. Of these

emperors, Trajan possessed the most powerful and vigorous mind — a consummate general, a humane but active ruler: Hadrian was the profoundest statesman, the Antonines the best men. The conduct of Trajan was that of a military sovereign, whose natural disposition was tempered with humanity — prompt, decisive, never unnecessarily prodigal of blood, but careless of human life, if it appeared to stand in the way of any important design, or to hazard that paramount object of the government, the public peace. Hadrian was inclined to a more temporising policy: the more the Roman empire was contemplated as a whole, the more the co-existence of multifarious religions might appear compatible with the general peace. Christianity might, in the end, be no more dangerous than the other foreign religions, which had flowed, and were still flowing in, from the East. The temples of Isis had arisen throughout the empire; but those of Jupiter or Apollo had not lost their votaries: the Eastern mysteries, the Phrygian, at a later period the Mithriac, had mingled, very little to their prejudice, into the general mass of the prevailing superstitions. The last characteristic of Christianity which would be distinctly understood, was its invasive and uncompromising spirit. The elder Antonine may have pursued from mildness of character the course adopted by Hadrian from policy. The change which took place during the reign of Marcus Aurelius may be attributed to the circumstances of the time; though the pride of philosophy, as

Trajan Emperor from A. D. 98 to 116.

Hadrian Emperor from 117 to 138.

Antoninus Pius Emperor from 138 to 161.

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well as the established religion, might begin to take the alarm.

Christianity had probably spread with partial and very unequal success in different quarters: its converts bore in various cities or districts a very different proportion to the rest of the population. No where, perhaps, had it advanced with greater rapidity than in the northern provinces of Asia Minor, where the inhabitants were of very mingled descent, neither purely Greek, nor essentially Asiatic, with a considerable proportion of Jewish colonists, chiefly of Babylonian or Syrian, not of Palestinian origin. It is here, in the province of Bithynia, that Polytheism first discovered the deadly enemy, which was undermining her authority. It was here that the first cry of distress was uttered; and complaints of deserted temples and less frequent sacrifices were brought before the tribunal of the government. The memorable correspondence between Pliny and Trajan is the most valuable record of the early Christian history during this period.* It represents to us Paganism already claiming the alliance of power to maintain its decaying influence; Christianity proceeding in its silent course, imperfectly understood by a wise and polite Pagan, yet still with nothing to offend his moral judgment, except its contumacious repugnance to the common usages of society. This con-

Christianity in Bithynia and the adjacent provinces.

A. D. 111, or 112.

* The chronology of Pagi (Critica in Baronium) appears to me the most trustworthy. He places the letter of Pliny in the year cxi. or cxii.; the martyrdom of Ignatius or rather the period when he was sent to Rome, in cxii., the time when Trajan was in the East, preparing for his Persian war.

tumacy, nevertheless, according to the recognised principle of passive obedience to the laws of the empire, was deserving of the severest punishment.* The appeal of Pliny to the supreme authority for advice, as to the course to be pursued with these new, and, in most respects, harmless delinquents, unquestionably implies that no general practice had yet been laid down to guide the provincial governors under such emergencies.† The answer of Trajan is characterised by a spirit of moderation. It betrays an humane anxiety to allow all such offenders as were not forced under the cognisance of the public tribunals, to elude persecution. Nevertheless it distinctly intimates, that by some existing law, or by the ordinary power of the provincial governor, the Christians were amenable to the severest penalties, to torture, and even to capital punishment. Such punishment had already been inflicted by Pliny; the governor had been forced to interfere, by accusations lodged before his tribunal. An anonymous libel, or impeachment, had denounced numbers of persons, some of whom altogether disclaimed, others declared that they had renounced Christianity. With that unthinking barbarity with which in those times such punishments were inflicted on persons in inferior station, two

Letter of Pliny.

Answer of Trajan.

* The conjecture of Pagi, that the attention of the government was directed to the Christians by their standing aloof from the festivals on the celebration of the Quindecennalia of Trajan, which fell on the year cxi. or cxii., is extremely probable. Pagi quotes two passages of Pliny on the subject of these general rejoicings. Critica in Bar. i. p. 100.

† Pliny professes his ignorance, because he had never happened to be present at the trial of such causes. This implies that such trials were not unprecedented.

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servants, females—it is possible they were deaconesses—were put to the torture, to ascertain the truth of the vulgar accusations against the Christians. On their evidence, Pliny could detect nothing further than a "culpable and extravagant superstition."* The only facts which he could discover were, that they had a custom of meeting together before daylight, and singing a hymn to Christ as God. They were bound together by no unlawful sacrament, but only under mutual obligation not to commit theft, robbery, adultery, or fraud. They met again, and partook together of food, but that of a perfectly innocent kind. The test of guilt to which he submitted the more obstinate delinquents, was adoration before the statues of the Gods and of the Emperor, and the malediction of Christ. Those who refused he ordered to be led out to execution.† Such was the summary process of the Roman governor; and the approbation of the Emperor clearly shows, that he had not exceeded the recognised limits of his authority. Neither Trajan nor the senate had before this issued any edict on the subject. The rescript to Pliny invested him in no new powers, it merely advised him, as he had done, to use his actual powers with discretion‡, neither to encourage the denunciation of such criminals, nor to proceed without fair and unquestionable evidence. The system of anonymous delation, by which private malice might

* Prava et immodica superstitio.

† Duci jussi cannot bear a milder interpretation.

‡ Actum quem debuisti in excutiendis causis eorum, qui Christiani ad te delati fuerant, secutus es. Traj. ad Plin.

wreak itself, by false or by unnecessary charges upon its enemies, Trajan reprobates in that generous spirit with which the wiser and more virtuous emperors constantly repressed that most disgraceful iniquity of the times.* But it is manifest from the executions ordered by Pliny, and sanctioned by the approbation of the Emperor, that Christianity was *already* an offence amenable to capital punishment †, and this, either under some existing statute, under the common law of the empire which invested the provincial governor with the arbitrary power of life and death, or lastly, what in this instance cannot have been the case, the *summum imperium* of the Emperor.‡ While then in the individual the profession of Christianity might thus by the summary sentence of the governor, and the tacit approbation of the Emperor, be treated as a capital offence, and the provincial governor might appoint the measure and the extent of the punishment, all public assemblies for the purpose of new and unauthorised worship might likewise be suppressed by the magistrate; for the police of the empire always looked with the utmost jealousy on all associations not recognised

* Nam et pessimi exempli, nec nostri sæculi est.

† Those who were Roman citizens were sent for trial to Rome. Alii quia cives Romani erant, adnotavi in urbem remittendos.

‡ This rescript or answer of Trajan, approving of the manner in which Pliny carried his law into execution, and suggesting other regulations for his conduct, is converted by Mosheim into a new law, which from that time became one of the statutes of the empire. Hæc Trajani lex inter publicas Imperii sanctiones relata (p. 234.). Trajan's words expressly declare that no certain rule of proceeding can be laid down, and leave almost the whole question to the discretion of the magistrate. Neque enim in universum aliquid, quod quasi certam formam habeat, constitui potest. Traj. ad Plin.

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by the law; and resistance to such a mandate would call down, or the secret holding of such meetings after their prohibition, would incur any penalty, which the conservator of public order might think proper to inflict upon the delinquent. Such then was the general position of the Christians with the ruling authorities. They were guilty of a crime against the state, by introducing a new and unauthorized religion, or by holding assemblages contrary to the internal regulations of the empire. But the extent to which the law would be enforced against them — how far Christianity would be distinguished from Judaism and other foreign religions, which were permitted the free establishment of their rites — with how much greater jealousy their secret assemblies would be watched than those of other mysteries and esoteric religions — all this would depend upon the milder or more rigid character of the governor, and the willingness or reluctance of their fellow-citizens to arraign them before the tribunal of the magistrates. This in turn would depend on the circumstances of the place and the time; on the caprice of their enemies; on their own discretion; on their success and the apprehensions and jealousies of their opponents. In general, so long as they made no visible impression upon society, so long as their absence from the religious rites of the city or district, or even from the games and theatrical exhibitions, which were essential parts of the existing Polytheism, caused no sensible diminution in the concourse of the worshippers, their unsocial

and self-secluding disposition would be treated with contempt and pity rather than with animosity. The internal decay of the spirit of Polytheism had little effect on its outward splendour. The philosophic party, who despised the popular faith, were secure in their rank, or in their decent conformity to the public ceremonial. The theory of all the systems of philosophy was to avoid unnecessary collision with the popular religious sentiment: their superiority to the vulgar was flattered, rather than offended, by the adherence of the latter to their native superstitions. In the public exhibitions, the followers of all other foreign religions met, as on a common ground. In the theatre or the hippodrome, the worshipper of Isis or of Mithra mingled with the mass of those who still adhered to Bacchus or to Jupiter. Even the Jews, in many parts, at least at a later period, in some instances at the present, betrayed no aversion to the popular games or amusements. Though in Palestine, the elder Herod had met with a sullen and intractable resistance in the religious body of the people, against his attempt to introduce Gentile and idolatrous games into the Holy Land, yet it is probable that the foreign Jews were more accommodating. A Jewish player, named Aliturus, stood high in the favour of Nero; nor does it appear that he had abandoned his religion. He was still connected with his own race; and some of the priesthood did not disdain to owe their acquittal, on certain charges on which they had been sent prisoners to Rome, to his interest with the Emperor, or with the ruling

The Jews not averse to theatrical amusements.

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favourite Poppæa. After the Jewish war, multitudes of the prisoners were forced to exhibit themselves as gladiators; and at a later period, the confluence of the Alexandrian Jews to the theatres, where they equalled in numbers the Pagan spectators, endangered the peace of the city. The Christians alone stood aloof from exhibitions which, in their higher and nobler forms, arose out of, and were closely connected with, the Heathen religion; were performed on days sacred to the deities; introduced the deities upon the stage; and, in short, were among the principal means of maintaining in the public mind its reverence for the old mythological fables. The sanguinary diversions of the arena, and the licentious voluptuousness of some of the other exhibitions, were no less offensive to their humanity and their modesty, than those more strictly religious to their piety. Still, as long as they were comparatively few in number, and did not sensibly diminish the concourse to these scenes of public enjoyment, they would be rather exposed to individual acts of vexatious interference, of ridicule, or contempt, than become the victims of a general hostile feeling: their absence would not be resented as an insult upon the public, nor as an act of punishable disrespect against the local or more widely-worshipped deity to whose honour the games were dedicated. The time at which they would be in the greatest danger from what would be thought their suspicious or disloyal refusal to join in the public rejoicings, would be precisely that which has been conjectured with much ingenuity

Christians abstain from them.

and probability to have been the occasion of their being thus committed with the popular sentiment and with the government, — the celebration of the birthday, or the accession of the Emperor.* With the ceremonial of those days, even if, as may have been the case, the actual adoration of the statue of the Emperor was not an ordinary part of the ritual, much which was strictly idolatrous would be mingled up; and their ordinary excuse to such charges of disaffection, that they prayed with the utmost fervour for the welfare of the Emperor, would not be admitted, either by the sincere attachment of the people and of the government to a virtuous, or their abject and adulatory celebration of a cruel and tyrannical, Emperor.

Its danger on occasions of political rejoicings.

This crisis in the fate of Christianity; this transition from safe and despicable obscurity to dangerous and obnoxious importance, would of course depend on the comparative rapidity of its progress in different quarters. In the province of Pliny, it had attained that height in little more than seventy years after the death of Christ. Though an humane and enlightened government might still endeavour to close its eyes upon its multiplying numbers and expanding influence, the keener sight of jealous interest, of rivalry in the command of the popular mind, and of mortified pride, already anticipated the

* The conjecture of Pagi, that the attention of the government was directed to the Christians by their standing aloof from the festivals which celebrated the quindecennalia of Trajan (in the year 111 or 112), is extremely probable. Pagi quotes two passages of Pliny on the subject of these general rejoicings. Critica in Baron, i. 100.

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time when this formidable antagonist might balance, might at length overweigh, the failing powers of Polytheism. Under a less candid governor than Pliny, and an Emperor less humane and dispassionate than Trajan, the exterminating sword of persecution would have been let loose, and a relentless and systematic edict for the suppression of Christianity hunted down its followers in every quarter of the empire.

Not only the wisdom and humanity of Trajan, but the military character of his reign, would tend to divert his attention from that which belonged rather to the internal administration of the empire.

Probable connection of the persecution under Pliny with the state of the East.

It is not altogether impossible, though the conjecture is not countenanced by any allusion in the despatch of Pliny, that the measures adopted against the Christians were not entirely unconnected with the political state of the East. The Roman empire, in the Mesopotamian province, was held on a precarious tenure; the Parthian kingdom had acquired new vigour and energy, and during great part of his reign, the state of the East must have occupied the active mind of Trajan. The Jewish population of Babylonia and the adjacent provinces were of no inconsiderable importance in the impending contest. There is strong ground for supposing that the last insurrection of the Jews, under Hadrian, was connected with a rising of their brethren in Mesopotamia, no doubt secretly, if not openly, fomented by the intrigues, and depending on the support, of the king of Parthia. This was at a considerably later period; yet, during the earlier part of the reign of Trajan, the insurrection had already

commenced in Egypt and in Cyrene, and in the island of Cyprus, and no sooner were the troops of Trajan engaged on the Eastern frontier towards the close of his reign, than the Jews rose up in all these provinces, and were not subdued till after they had perpetrated and endured the most terrific massacres.* Throughout the Eastern wars of Trajan, this spirit was most likely known to be fermenting in the minds of the whole Jewish population, not only in the insurgent districts, but in Palestine and other parts of the empire. The whole race, which occupied in such vast numbers the conterminous regions, therefore, would be watched with hostile jealousy by the Roman governors, already prejudiced against their unruly and ungovernable character, and awakened to more than ordinary vigilance by the disturbed aspect of the times. The Christians stood in a singular and ambiguous position between the Jewish and Pagan population; many of them probably descended from, and connected with, the former. Their general peaceful habits and orderly conduct would deserve the protection of a parental government, still their intractable and persevering resistance to the religious institutions of the empire might throw some suspicion on the sincerity of their civil obedience. The unusual assertion of religious might be too closely allied with that of political independence. At all events, the dubious and menacing state of the East required more than ordinary watchfulness, and a more rigid plan of government

* Euseb. iv. 2. Dio. Cass., or rather, Xyphilin. Pagi places this Jewish rebellion, Orosius, l. 7. A.D. 116.

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in the adjacent provinces; and thus the change in society, which was working unnoticed in the more peaceful and less Christianised West, in the East might be forced upon the attention of an active and inquiring ruler; the apprehensions of the inhabitants themselves would be more keenly alive to the formation of a separate and secluded party within their cities; and religious animosity would eagerly seize the opportunity of implicating its enemies in a charge of disaffection to the existing government. Nor is there wanting evidence that the acts of persecution ascribed to Trajan were, in fact, connected with the military movements of the Emperor. The only authentic Acts are those of Simeon, Bishop of Jerusalem, and of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch.* In the prefatory observations to the former, it is admitted that it was a local act of violence. The more celebrated trial of Ignatius is stated to have taken place before the Emperor himself at Antioch, when he was preparing for his first Eastern campaign.† The Emperor is represented as kindling to anger at the disparagement of those gods on whose protection he depended in the impending war. "What, is our religion to be treated as senseless? Are the gods, on whose alliance we rely against our enemies, to be turned to scorn?"‡ If we may trust the epistles ascribed to this bishop, there was an eagerness for martyrdom not quite

* See them in Ruinart. Selecta et sincera Martyrum Acta.

† According to the chronology of Pagi, A.D. 112.

‡ ἡμεῖς οὖν σοι δοκοῦμεν κατὰ νοῦν μὴ ἔχειν θεούς, οἷς καὶ χρώμεθα συμμάχοις πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους. The Jewish legends are full of acts of personal cruelty, ascribed to Trajan, mingled up, as usual, with historical errors and anachronisms. See Hist. of Jews, iii. 109.

consistent with the conduct of the Apostles, and betraying a spirit, which, at least, would not allay, by prudential concession, the indignation and resentment of the government.*

Hadrian Emperor, A. D. 117.

The cosmopolite and indefatigable mind of Hadrian was more likely to discern with accuracy, and estimate to its real extent, the growing influence of the new religion. Hadrian was, still more than his predecessor, the Emperor of the West, rather than the monarch of Rome. His active genius withdrew itself altogether from warlike enterprise and foreign conquest; its whole care was centered on the consolidation of the empire within its narrower and uncontested boundaries, and on the internal regulation of the vast confederacy of nations which were gradually becoming more and more assimilated, as subjects or members of the great European empire. The remotest provinces for the first time beheld the presence of the Emperor, not at the head of an army, summoned to defend the insulted barriers of the Roman territory, or pushing forward the advancing line of conquest, but in more peaceful array, providing for the future security of the frontier by impregnable fortresses; adorning the more flourishing cities with public buildings, bridges, and aqueducts; inquiring into the customs, manners, and even the religion, of the more distant

* The epistles represent Ignatius as holding correspondence with the most eminent bishops of Asia Minor, who do not appear to have been in danger of persecution; that to the Romans deprecates all kindly interference with the government to avert the glorious destiny which he coveted, and intimates some apprehension lest their unwelcome appeal to the imperial clemency might meet with success. I consider this an argument for their authenticity.

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parts of the world; encouraging commerce; promoting the arts; in short, improving, by salutary regulations, this long period of peace, to the prosperity and civilisation of the whole empire. Gaul, Britain, Greece, Syria, Egypt, Africa, were in turn honoured by the presence, enriched by the liberality, and benefited by the wise policy of the Emperor.* His personal character showed the same incessant activity and politic versatility. On the frontier, at the head of the army, he put on the hardihood and simplicity of a soldier; disdained any distinction, either of fare or of comfort, from the meanest legionary; and marched on foot, through the most inclement seasons. In the peaceful and voluptuous cities of the South, he became the careless and luxurious Epicurean. Hadrian treated the established religion with the utmost respect; he officiated with solemn dignity as supreme pontiff, and at Rome affected disdain or aversion for foreign religions.† But his mind was essentially imbued with the philosophic spirit‡: he was tempted by every abstruse research, and

Character of Hadrian.

* M. St. Croix observes (in an essay in the Mém. de l'Académ. xlix. 409.) that we have medals of twenty-five countries through which Hadrian travelled. (Compare Eckhel, vi. 486.) He looked into the crater of Etna; saw the sun rise from Mount Casius; ascended to the cataracts of the Nile; heard the statue of Memnon. He imported exotics from the East. The journeys of Hadrian are traced, in a note to M. Solvet's translation of Hegewisch, cited above. Tertullian calls him curiositatum omnium explorator. Apol. i. v. Eusebius, E. H. v. 5., *πάντα τὰ περιέργα πολυπραγμονῶν.*

† Sacra Romana diligentissimè curavit, peregrina contempsit. Spartian. in Hadrian.

‡ Les autres sentiments de ce prince sont très difficiles à connaître. Il n'embrassa aucun secte, et ne fut ni Académicien, ni Stoicien, encore moins Epicurien; il parut constamment livré à cette incertitude d'opinions, fruit de la bizarrerie de son caractère, et d'un savoir superficiel ou mal digéré. St. Croix, ubi suprà.

every forbidden inquiry had irresistible attraction for his curious and busy temper.* At Athens, he was in turn the simple and rational philosopher, the restorer of the splendid temple of Jupiter Olympius, and the awe-struck worshipper in the Eleusinian mysteries.† In the East, he aspired to penetrate the recondite secrets of magic, and professed himself an adept in judicial astrology. In the midst of all this tampering with foreign religions, he at once honoured and outraged the prevailing creed, by the deification of Antinous, in whose honour quinquennial games were established at Mantinea; a city built, and a temple, with an endowment for a priesthood‡, founded and called by his name, in Egypt: his statues assumed the symbols of various deities. Acts like these, at this critical period, must have tended to alienate a large portion of the thinking class, already wavering in their cold and doubtful Polytheism, to any purer or more ennobling system of religion.

Hadrian not merely surveyed the surface of society, but his sagacity seemed to penetrate deeper into the relations of the different classes to each other, and into the more secret workings of the social system. His regulations for the mitigation of

* In the Cæsars of Julian, Hadrian is described in the pregnant phrase πολυπραγμονῶν τὰ ἀπόῤῥητα,—busied about all the secret religions.

† The Apology of Quadratus was presented on Hadrian's visit to Athens, when he was initiated in the mysteries; that of Aristides when he became Epoptes, A.D. 131. Warburton connects the hostility of the celebrators of the mysteries towards Christianity with the Apology of Quadratus, and quotes a passage from Jerome to this effect. Compare Routh's Reliquiæ Sacræ, i. 70.

‡ Euseb. iv. 8. Hieronym. in Catal. et Rufin.

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slavery were recommended, not by humanity alone, but by a wise and prudent policy.* It was impossible that the rapid growth of Christianity could escape the notice of a mind so inquiring as that of Hadrian, or that he could be altogether blind to its ultimate bearings on the social state of the empire. Yet, the generally humane and pacific character of his government would be a security against violent measures of persecution; and the liberal study of the varieties of human opinion would induce, if not a wise and rational spirit of toleration, yet a kind of contemptuous indifference towards the most inexplicable aberrations from the prevailing opinions. The apologists for Christianity, Quadratus and Aristides, addressed their works to the Emperor, who does not appear to have repelled their respectful homage.† The rescript which he addressed, in the early part of his reign, to the proconsul of Asia, afforded the same protection to the Christians against the more formidable danger of popular animosity, which Trajan had granted against anonymous delation. In some of the Asiatic cities, their sullen and unsocial absence from the public assemblies, from the games, and other public exhibitions, either provoked or gave an opportunity for the latent animosity to break out against them. A general acclammation would sometimes demand their punishment. "The Christians to the lions!" was the general outcry; and the names

Hadrian's conduct towards Christianity.

* Gibbon, vol. i. ch. ii. p. 71.

† See the fragments in Routh, Reliquiæ Sacræ, i. 69—78.

CHAP. VI.

of the most prominent or obnoxious of the community would be denounced with the same sudden and uncontrollable hostility. A weak or superstitious magistrate trembled before the popular voice, or lent himself a willing instrument to the fury of the populace. The proconsul Serenus Granianus consulted the Emperor as to the course to be pursued on such occasions. The answer of Hadrian is addressed to Minucius Fundanus, probably the successor of Granianus, enacting that, in the prosecution of the Christians, the formalities of law should be strictly complied with; that they should be regularly arraigned before the legal tribunal, not condemned on the mere demand of the populace, or in compliance with a lawless outcry.* The edict does credit to the humanity and wisdom of Hadrian. But, notwithstanding his active and inquisitive mind, and the ability of his general policy, few persons were, perhaps, less qualified to judge of the real nature of the new religion, or to comprehend the tenacious hold which it would obtain upon the mind of man. His character wanted depth and seriousness, to penetrate or to understand the workings of a high, profound, and settled religious enthusiasm.† The graceful verses,

Hadrian incapable of understanding Christianity.

* Justin Martyr, Apol. i. 68, 69. Euseb. H. E. iv. 9. Mosheim, whose opinions on the state of the Christians are coloured by too lenient a view of Roman toleration, considers this edict by no means more favourable to the Christians than that of Trajan. It evidently offered them protection under a new and peculiar exigency.

† The well-known letter of Hadrian gives a singular view of the state of the religious society, as it existed, or, rather, as it appeared to the inquisitive Emperor. "I am now, my dear Servianus, become fully acquainted with that Egypt which you praise so highly. I have found the people vain, fickle, and shifting with every

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which he addressed to his departing spirit *, contrasts with the solemn earnestness with which the Christians were teaching mankind to consider the mysteries of another life. But, on the whole, the long and peaceful reign of Hadrian allowed free scope to the progress of Christianity; the increasing wealth and prosperity of the empire probably raised in the social scale that class among which it was chiefly disseminated; while the better part of the more opulent would be tempted, at least to make themselves acquainted with a religion, the moral influence of which was so manifestly favourable to the happiness of mankind, and which offered so noble a solution of the great problem of human philosophy, the immortality of the soul.

Antoninus Pius Emperor, A. D. 138.

The gentle temper of the first Antoninus would maintain that milder system which was adopted by Hadrian, from policy or from indifference. The Emperor, whose parental vigilance scrutinised the

breath of popular rumour. Those who worship Serapis are Christians; and those who call themselves Christian bishops are worshippers of Serapis. There is no ruler of a Jewish synagogue, no Samaritan, no Christian bishop, who is not an astrologer, an interpreter of prodigies, and an anointer. The Patriarch himself, when he comes to Egypt, is compelled by one party to worship Serapis, by the other, Christ. * * * They have but one God: him, Christians, Jews, and Gentiles, worship alike." This latter clause Casaubon understood seriously. It is evidently malicious satire. The common God is Gain. The key to the former curious statement is probably that the tone of the higher, the fashionable, society of Alexandria, was to affect, either on some Gnostic or philosophic theory, that all these religions differed only in form, but were essentially the same; that all adored one Deity, all one Logos or Demiurge, under different names; all employed the same arts to impose upon the vulgar, and all were equally despicable to the real philosopher. Dr. Burton, in his History of the Church, suggested, with much ingenuity, that the Samaritans may have been the Gnostic followers of Simon Magus.

* Animula, vagula, blandula,
Hospes, comesque corporis,
Quæ nunc abibis in loca ?

minutest affairs of the most remote province, could not be ignorant, though his own residence was fixed in Rome and its immediate neighbourhood, of the still expanding progress of Christianity. The religion itself acquired every year a more public character. The Apology now assumed the tone of an arraignment of the folly and unholiness of the established Polytheism; nor was this a low and concealed murmur within the walls of its own places of assemblage, or propagated in the quiet intercourse of the brethren. It no longer affected disguise, nor dissembled its hopes; it approached the foot of the throne; it stood in the attitude, indeed, of a suppliant, claiming the inalienable rights of conscience, but asserting in simple confidence its moral superiority, and in the name of an apology, publicly preaching its own doctrines in the ears of the sovereign and of the world. The philosophers were joining its ranks; it was rapidly growing up into a rival power, both of the religions and philosophies of the world. Yet, during a reign in which human life assumed a value and a sanctity before unknown; in which the hallowed person of a senator was not once violated, even by the stern hand of justice*; under an emperor who professed and practised the maxim of Scipio, that he had rather save the life of a single citizen than cause the death of a thousand enemies†; who considered the subjects of the empire as one family, of which himself was the parent‡, even religious zeal would be rebuked

* Jul. Capit. Anton. Pius, Aug. Script. p. 138.

† Ibid, p. 140.

‡ The reign of Antoninus the

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and overawed; and the provincial governments, which too often reflected the fierce passions and violent barbarities of the throne, would now, in turn, image back the calm and placid serenity of the imperial tribunal. Edicts are said to have been issued to some of the Grecian cities—Larissa, Thessalonica, and Athens—and to the Greeks in general, to refrain from any unprecedented severities against the Christians. Another rescript*, addressed to the cities of Asia Minor, speaks language too distinctly Christian even for the anticipated Christianity of disposition evinced by Antoninus. It calls upon the Pagans to avert the anger of Heaven, which was displayed in earthquakes and other public calamities, by imitating the piety, rather than denouncing the atheism, of the Christians. The pleasing vision must, it is to be feared, be abandoned, which would represent the best of the Pagan Emperors bearing his public testimony in favour of the calumniated Christians; the man who, from whatever cause, deservedly bore the name of the Pious among the adherents of his own religion, the most wisely tolerant to the faith of the Gospel.

First is almost a blank in history. The book of Dion Cassius which contained his reign was lost, except a small part, when Xiphilin wrote. Xiphilin asserts that Antoninus favoured the Christians.

* The rescript of Antonine, in Eusebius, to which Xiphilin alludes (Euseb. iv. 13), in favour of the Christians, is now generally given up as spurious. The older writers disputed to which of the Antonines it belonged. Lardner argues, from the Apologies of Justin Martyr, that the Christians were persecuted "even to death," during this reign. The inference is inconclusive: they were obnoxious to the law, and might endeavour to gain the law on their side, though it may not have been carried into execution. The general voice of Christian antiquity is favourable to the first Antoninus.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTIANITY AND MARCUS AURELIUS THE PHILOSOPHER.

THE virtue of Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher, was of a more lofty and vigorous character than that of his gentle predecessor. The second Antonine might seem the last effort of Paganism, or rather of Gentile philosophy, to raise a worthy opponent to the triumphant career of Christianity. A blameless disciple in the severest school of philosophic morality, the austerity of Marcus rivalled that of the Christians in its contempt of the follies and diversions of life; yet his native kindliness of disposition was not hardened and embittered by the severity or the pride of his philosophy.* With Aurelius, nevertheless, Christianity found not only a fair and high-minded competitor for the command of the human mind; not only a rival in the exaltation of the soul of man to higher views and more dignified motives, but a violent and intolerant persecutor. During his reign, the martyrologies become more authentic and credible; the general voice of Christian history arraigns the philosopher, not indeed as the author of a general and systematic plan for the extirpation of Christianity, but as withdrawing even the ambiguous protection of the former Emperors, and giving free scope to the excited passions, the wounded pride, and the jealous

* Verecundus sine ignaviâ, sine tristitiâ gravis. Jul. Capit. Aug. Hist. p. 160.

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interests of its enemies; neither discountenancing the stern determination of the haughty governor to break the contumacious spirit of resistance to his authority, nor the outburst of popular fury, which sought to appease the offended gods by the sacrifice of these despisers of their Deities.

Three causes of the hostility of M. Aurelius and his government to Christianity.

Three important causes concurred in bringing about this dangerous crisis in the destiny of Christianity at this particular period: — 1. The change in the relative position of Christianity with the religion of the empire; 2. the circumstances of the times; 3. the character of the Emperor.

1. Altered position of Christianity in regard to Paganism.

1. Sixty years of almost uninterrupted peace, since the beginning of the second century, had opened a wide field for the free development of Christianity. It had spread into every quarter of the Roman dominions. The western provinces, Gaul and Africa, rivalled the East in the number, if not in the opulence, of their Christian congregations: in almost every city had gradually arisen a separate community, seceding from the ordinary habits and usages of life, at least from the public religious ceremonial; governed by its own laws; acting upon a common principle; and bound together in a kind of latent federal union throughout the empire. A close and intimate correspondence connected this new moral republic; an impulse, an opinion, a feeling, which originated in Egypt or Syria, was propagated with electric rapidity to the remotest frontier of the West. Irenæus, the Bishop of Lyons, in Gaul, whose purer Greek had been in danger of corruption from his intercourse with the bar-

barous Celtic tribes, enters into a controversy with the speculative teachers of Antioch, Edessa, or Alexandria, while Tertullian in his rude African Latin denounces or advocates opinions which sprung up in Pontus or in Phrygia. A new kind of literature had arisen, propagated with the utmost zeal of proselytism, among a numerous class of readers, who began to close their ears against the profane fables, and unsatisfactory philosophical systems, of Paganism. While the Emperor himself condescended, in Greek of no despicable purity and elegance for the age, to explain the lofty tenets of the Porch, and to commend its noble morality to his subjects, the minds of a large portion of the world were preoccupied by writers who, in language often impregnated with foreign and Syrian barbarisms, enforced still higher morals, resting upon religious tenets altogether new and incomprehensible, excepting to the initiate. Their sacred books were of still higher authority; commanded the homage, and required the diligent and respectful study, of all the disciples of the new faith. Nor was this empire within the empire, this universally disseminated sect, — which had its own religious rites, its own laws, to which it appealed rather than to the statutes of the empire; its own judges (for the Christians, wherever they were able, submitted their disputes to their bishop and his associate presbyters) its own financial regulations, whether for the maintenance of public worship, or for charitable purposes; its own religious superiors, who exercised a very different control from that of the pon-

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tiffs or sacerdotal colleges of Paganism; its own usages and conduct; in some respects its own language; — confined to one class, or to one description of Roman subjects. Christians were to be found in the court, in the camp, in the commercial market; they discharged all the duties, and did not decline any of the offices, of society. They did not altogether shun the forum, or abandon all interest in the civil administration; they had their mercantile transactions, in common with the rest of that class. One of their apologists indignantly repels the charge of their being useless to society: "We are no Indian Brahmins, or devotees, living naked in the woods, self-banished from civilised life." * Among their most remarkable distinctions, no doubt, was their admission of slaves to an equality in religious privileges. Yet there was no attempt to disorganise or correct the existing relations of society. Though the treatment of slaves in Christian families could not but be softened and humanised, as well by the evangelic temper, as by this acknowledged equality in the hopes of another life, yet Christianity left the emancipation of mankind from these deeply-rooted distinctions

* Infructuosi in negotiis dicimur. Quo pacto homines vobiscum degentes, ejusdem victûs, habitûs, instinctûs, ejusdem ad vitam necessitatis? Neque enim Brachmanæ, aut Indorum gymnosophistæ sumus, sylvicolæ et exules vitæ. Meminimus gratiam nos debere Deo domino creatori, nullum fructum operum ejus repudiamur, planè temperamus, ne ultra modum aut perperam utamur. Itaque non sine foro, non sine macello, non sine balneis, tabernis, officinis, stabulis, nundinis vestris, cæterisque commerciis, cohabitamus in hoc seculo: navigamus et nos vobiscum et *militamus*, et rusticamur, et mercamur; proinde miscemus artes, opera nostra publicamus usui vestro. Tertull. Apologet. c. 42.

between the free and servile races, to times which might be ripe for so great and important a change. CHAP. VII.

This secession of one part of society from its accustomed religious intercourse with the rest, independent of the numbers whose feelings and interests were implicated in the support of the national religion in all its pomp and authority, would necessarily produce estrangement, jealousy, animosity.

Connection of Christianity with the fall of the Roman empire.

As Christianity became more powerful, a vague apprehension began to spread abroad among the Roman people that the fall of their old religion might, to a certain degree, involve that of their civil dominion; and this apprehension, it cannot be denied, was justified, deepened, and confirmed, by the tone of some of the Christian writings, no doubt, by the language of some Christian teachers. Idolatry was not merely an individual, but a national, sin, which would be visited by temporal as well as spiritual retribution. The anxiety of one at least, and that certainly not the most discreet of the Christian apologists, to disclaim all hostility towards the temporal dignity of the empire, implies that the Christians were obnoxious to this charge. The Christians are calumniated, writes Tertullian to Scapula*, at a somewhat later period (under Severus), as guilty of treasonable disloyalty to the Emperor. As the occasion required, he ex-

* Sed et circa majestatem imperii infamamur, tamen nunquam Albiniani, nec Nigriani, vel Cassiani, inveniri potuerunt Christiani.

Christianus nullius est hostis, nedum imperatoris; quem sciens a Deo suo constitui, necesse est ut et ipsum diligat, et revereatur, et honoret, et salvum velit, cum toto Romano imperio, quousque sæculum stabit: tamdiu enim stabit. Ad Scapulam, 1.

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culpates them from any leaning to Niger, Albinus, or Cassius, the competitors of Severus, and then proceeds to make this solemn protestation of loyalty. "The Christian is the enemy of no man, assuredly not of the Emperor. The sovereign he knows to be ordained by God: of necessity, therefore, he loves, reveres, and honours him, and prays for his safety, with that of the whole Roman empire, that it may endure—and endure it will—as long as the world itself."* But other Christian documents, or at least documents eagerly disseminated by the Christians, speak a very different language.† By many modern interpreters, the Apocalypse itself is supposed to refer not to the fall of a predicted spiritual Rome, but of the dominant Pagan Rome, the visible Babylon of idolatry, and pride, and cruelty. According to this view, it is a grand dramatic vaticination of the triumph of Christianity over Heathenism, in its secular as well as its spiritual power. Be this as it may, in later writings, the threatening and maledictory tone of the Apocalypse is manifestly borrowed, and directed against the total abolition of Paganism, in its civil as well as religious supremacy. Many of these forged prophetic writings belong to the reign of the Antonines, and could not emanate from any quarter but that of the more injudicious and fanatical Christians. The second (Apocryphal) book of

Tone of some Christian writings confirmatory of this apprehension.

* Quousque sæculum stabit.

† I have been much indebted, in this passage, to the excellent work of Tschirner, "der Fall des Heidenthums," a work written with so much learning, candour, and Christian temper, as to excite great regret that it was left incomplete at its author's death.

Esdras is of this character, the work of a Judaising Christian*; it refers distinctly to the reign of the twelve Cæsars†, and obscurely intimates, in many parts, the approaching dissolution of the existing order of things. The doctrine of the Millennium, which was as yet far from exploded, or fallen into disregard, mingled with all these prophetic anticipations of future change in the destinies of mankind.‡ The visible throne of Christ according to these writings, was to be erected on the ruins of all earthly empires: the nature of his kingdom would, of course, be unintelligible to the Heathen; and all that he would comprehend would be a vague notion that the empire of the world was to be transferred from Rome, and that this extinction of the majesty of the empire was, in some incomprehensible manner, connected with the triumph of the new faith. His terror, his indignation, and his contempt, would lead to fierce and implacable animosity. Even in Tertullian's Apology, the ambiguous word "sæculum" might mean no more than a brief and limited period, which was yet to elapse before the final consummation.

The Sibylline books.

But the Sibylline verses, which clearly belong to this period, express, in the most remarkable manner, this spirit of exulting menace at the expected simultaneous fall of Roman idolatry and of Roman

* The general character of the work, the nationality of the perpetual allusions to the history and fortunes of the race of Israel, betray the Jew; the passages ch. ii. 42. 48.; v. 5.; vii. 26. 29., are avowed Christianity.

† C. xii. 14. Compare Basnage, Hist. des Juifs, l. vii. c. 2.

‡ There are apparent allusions to the Millennium in the Sibylline verses, particularly at the close of the eighth book.

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empire. The origin of the whole of the Sibylline oracles now extant is not distinctly apparent, either from the style, the manner of composition, or the subject of their predictions.* It is manifest that they were largely interpolated by the Christians, to a late period, and some of the books can be assigned to no other time but the present.† Much, no doubt, was of an older date. It is scarcely credible that the fathers of this time would quote cotemporary forgeries as ancient prophecies. The Jews of Alexandria, who had acquired some taste for Grecian poetry, and displayed some talent for the translation of their sacred books into the Homeric language and metre‡, had, no doubt, set the example of versifying their own prophecies, and, perhaps, of ascribing them to the Sibyls, whose names were universally venerated, as revealing to mankind the secrets of futurity. They may have begun with comparing their own prophets with these ancient seers, and spoken of the predictions

* The first book, to page 176., may be Jewish; it then becomes Christian, as well as the second. But in these books there is little prophecy; it is in general the Mosaic history, in Greek hexameters. If there are any fragments of Heathen verses, they are in the third book.

† Ad horum imperatorum (Antonini Pii cum liberis suis M. Aurelio et Lucio Vero) tempora videntur Sibyllarum vaticinia tantum extendi; id quod etiam e lib. v. videre licet. Note of the editor, Opsopæus, p. 688.

‡ Compare Valckenaer's learned treatise de Aristobulo Judæo. The fragments of Ezekiel Tragædus, and many passages, which are evident versions of the Jewish scriptures, in the works of the fathers, particularly of Eusebius, may be traced to this school. It is by no means impossible that the Pollio of Virgil may owe many of its beauties to those Alexandrian versifiers of the Hebrew prophets. Virgil, who wrought up indiscriminately into his refined gold all the ruder ore which he found in the older poets, may have seen and admired some of these verses. He may have condescended, as he thought, to borrow the images of these religious books of the barbarians, as a modern might the images of the Vedas or of the Koran.

of Isaiah or Ezekiel as their Sibylline verses, which may have been another word for prophetic or oracular.

Almost every region of Heathenism boasts its Sibyl. Poetic predictions, ascribed to these inspired women, were either published or religiously preserved in the sacred archives of cities. No where were they held in such awful reverence as in Rome. The opening of the Sibylline books was an event of rare occurrence, and only at seasons of fearful disaster or peril. Nothing would be more tempting to the sterner or more ardent Christian, than to enlist, as it were, on his side, these authorised Pagan interpreters of futurity; to extort, as it were, from their own oracles, this confession of their approaching dissolution. Nothing, on the other hand, would more strongly excite the mingled feelings of apprehension and animosity in the minds of the Pagans, than this profanation, as it would seem, whether they disbelieved or credited them, of the sacred treasures of prophecy. It was Paganism made to utter, in its most hallowed language, and by its own inspired prophets, its own condemnation; to announce its own immediate downfall, and the triumph of its yet obscure enemy over both its religious and temporal dominion.

The fifth and eighth books of the Sibylline oracles, are those which most distinctly betray the sentiments and language of the Christians of this period.* In the spirit of the Jewish prophets, they denounce the folly of worshipping gods of wood

* Lib. v. p. 557.

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* Θμοῦις καὶ Ξοῦις ϑλίβεται, καὶ κόπτεται.
Βουλὴ Ἡρακλεούς τε Διός τε καὶ Ἑρμειάο.—P. 558.

The first of these lines is mutilated.

† Ἰσὶ, ϑεὰ τριτάλαινα, μενεῖς δ' ἐπὶ χεύμασι Νείλου,
Μούνη, μαινὰς ἄτακτος, ἐπὶ ψαμάθοις Ἀχέροντος,
Κοὐκέτι σου μνεῖά γε μενεῖ κατὰ γαίαν ἅπασαν.
Καὶ σὺ Σέραπι, λίθοις ἐπικείμενε, πολλὰ μογήσεις,
Κείσῃ πτῶμα μέγιστον, ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ τριταλαίνῃ.
* * * *
Γνώσονται σε τὸ μηδὲν, ὅσοι ϑεὸν ἐξύμνησαν.
Καὶ τις ἐρεῖ τῶν ἱερέων λινσόσσιος ἀνὴρ.
Δεῦτε ϑεοῦ τέμενος καλοὺ στήϑωμεν ἀληϑὲς,
Δεῦτε τὸν ἐκ προγόνων δεινὸν νόμον ἀλλάξωμεν,
Τοῦ χάριν ἢ λίϑινοις καὶ ὀστρακίνοισι ϑεοῖσι
Πομπὰς καὶ τελετὰς ποιούμενοι οὐκ ἐνοησαν,
Στρέψωμεν ψυχὰς, ϑεὸν ἄφϑιτον ἐξυμνοῦντες.
Αὐτὸν τὸν γενετῆρα, τὸν αἴδιον γεγαῶτα,
Τὸν πρυτανὶν πάντων, τὸν ἀληϑέα, τὸν βασιλῆα.
Ψυχοτρόφον γενετῆρα, ϑεὸν μέγαν, αἰὲν ἐόντα.
Lib. v. p. 638. edit. Gall. Amstelod. 1689.

a solitary Mænad by the sands of Acheron. No longer shall thy memory endure upon the earth. And thou, Serapis, that restest upon thy stones, much must thou suffer; thou shalt be the mightiest ruin in thrice hapless Egypt; and those, who worshipped thee for a god, shall know thee to be nothing. And one of the linen-clothed priests shall say, Come, let us build the beautiful temple of the true God; let us change the awful law of our ancestors, who, in their ignorance, made their pomps and festivals to gods of stone and clay; let us turn our hearts, hymning the Everlasting God, the Eternal Father, the Lord of all, the True, the the King, the Creator and Preserver of our souls, the Great, the Eternal God."

A bolder prophet, without doubt writing precisely at this perilous crisis, dares, in the name of a Sibyl, to connect together the approaching fall of Rome and the gods of Rome. "O, haughty Rome, the just chastisement of Heaven shall come down upon thee from on high; thou shalt stoop thy neck, and be levelled with the earth; and fire shall consume thee, razed to thy very foundations; and thy wealth shall perish; wolves and foxes shall dwell among thy ruins, and thou shalt be desolate as if thou hadst never been. Where then will be thy Palladium? Which of thy gods of gold, or of stone, or of brass, shall save thee? Where then the decrees of thy senate? Where the race of Rhea, of Saturn, or of Jove; all the lifeless deities thou hast worshipped, or the shades of the deified dead? When thrice five gorgeous Cæsars (the twelve Cæsars usually so called,

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with Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian), who have enslaved the world from east to west, shall be, one will arise silver-helmed, with a name like the neighbouring sea (Hadrian and the Hadriatic Sea)." * The poet describes the busy and lavish character of Hadrian, his curiosity in prying into all religious mysteries, and his deification of Antinöus. †

"After him shall reign three, *whose times shall be the last.* ‡ * * * Then from the uttermost parts

* Ἥξει σοὶ ποτ' ἄνωθεν ἴσῃ, ὑψαύχενε Ῥώμη,
Οὐράνιος πληγή, καὶ κάμψεις αὐχένα πρώτη,
Κἀξεδαφισθήσῃ, καὶ πῦρ σε ὅλην δαπανήσει
Κεκλιμένην ἐδάφεσσιν ἑοῖς, καὶ πλοῦτος ὀλεῖται,
Καὶ σὰ θέμεθλα λύκοι, καὶ ἀλώπεκες οἰκήσουσι.
Καὶ τότ' ἔσῃ πανέρημος ὅλως, ὡς μὴ γεγονεῖα.
Ποῦ τότε Παλλάδιον ; ποῖος σε θεὸς διασώσει,
Χρυσοῦς, ἢ λίθινος, ἢ χάλκεος ; ἢ τότε ποῦ σοι
Δόγματα συγκλήτου ; ποῦ, Ρεῖης, ἠὲ Κρόνοιο,
Ἠὲ Διὸς γενεή, καὶ πάντων ὧν ἰσεβάσθης
Δαίμονας ἀψύχους, νέκρῶν εἴδωλα καμόντων ;
* * * * *
Ἀλλ' ὅτε σοι βασιλεῖς χλιδανοὶ τρὶς πέντε γένονται,
Κόσμον δουλώσαντες ἀπ' ἀντολίης μέχρι δυσμῶν,
Ἔσσετ' ἄναξ πολιόκρανος, ἔχων πέλας οὔνομα πόντου.
Lib. viii. p. 679.

The ruin of Rome, and the restoration of Europe to the East, are likewise alluded to in the fol- passages. Lib. iii. p. 404—408. ; v. 573—576. ; viii. 694. 712. 718.

There is another allusion to Hadrian, lib. v. p. 552., much more laudatory, Ἔσται καὶ πανάριστος ἀνὴρ, καὶ πάντα νοήσει.

† Κόσμον ἐποπτεύων μιαρῷ ποδὶ, δῶρα πορίζων
* * * *
Καὶ μαγικῶν ἀδύτων μυστήρια πάντα μεθίξει,
Παιδὰ θεὸν δεικνύσει, ἅπαντα σεβάσματα λύσει. — P. 688.

‡ Τὸν μετὰ τρεῖς ἄρξουσι, πανύστατον ἦμαρ ἔχοντες —

One of these three is to be an old man, to heap up vast treasures, in order to surrender them to the eastern destroyer, Nero —

ἣν ὅταν γ' ἀπανέλθῃ
Ἐκ περάτων γαιῆς ὁ φυγας μητροκτόνος ἐλθών.
Καὶ τότε πενθήσεις, πλατὺ πόρφυρον ἡγεμονήων
Φῶς ἐκδυσαμένη, καὶ πένθιμον εἶμα φεροῦσα.
* * * * *

of the earth, whither he fled, shall the matricide (Nero) return.* And now, O king of Rome shalt thou mourn, disrobed of the purple laticlave of thy rulers, and clad in sackcloth. The glory of thy eagle-bearing legions shall perish. Where shall be thy might? what land, which thou hast enslaved by thy vain laurels, shall be thine ally? For there shall be confusion on all mortals over the whole earth, when the Almighty Ruler comes, and, seated upon his throne, judges the souls of the quick and of the

Καὶ γὰρ ἀετοφόρων λεγεώνων δόξα πεσεῖται.
Ποῦ τότε σοι τὸ κράτος; ποία γῆ σύμμαχος ἔσται,
Δουλωθεῖσα τεαῖς ματαιοφροσύνῃσιν ἀθέσμως;
Πάσης γὰρ γαίης ϑνητῶν τότε σύγχυσις ἔσται,
Αὐτὸς παντοκράτωρ ὅταν ἐλθὼν βήμασι κρίνῃ
Ζώντων καὶ νεκύων ψυχὰς, καὶ κόσμον ἅπαντα.
* * * * * *
Ἐκ τοτέ σοι βρυγμὸς, καὶ σκορπισμὸς, καὶ ἅλωσις,
Πτῶσις ὅταν ἔλθῃ πόλεων, καὶ χάσματα γαίης.

Lib. viii. 688.

* The strange notion of the flight of Nero beyond the Euphrates, from whence he was to return as Antichrist, is almost the burthen of the Sibylline verses. Compare lib. iv. p. 520—525.; v. 573., where there is an allusion to his theatrical tastes, 619—714. The best commentary is that of St. Augustin on the Thessalonians. "Et tunc revelabitur ille iniquus. Ego prorsus quid dixerit me fateor ignorare. Suspiciones tamen hominum, quas vel audire vel legere de hâc re potui, non tacebo. Quidam putant hoc de *imperio dictum fuisse Romano;* et propterea Paulum Apostolum non id apertè scribere voluisse, ne calumniam videlicet incurreret quod Romano imperio malè optaverit, cum sperаretur æternum: ut hoc quod dixit, 'Jam enim mysterium iniquitatis operatur,' Neronem voluerit intelligi, cujus jam facta velut Antichristi videbantur; unde nonnulli ipsum resurrecturum et futurum Antichristum suspicantur. Alii vero nec eum occisum putant, sed subtractum potiùs, ut putaretur occisus; et vivum occultari in vigore ipsius ætatis, in quâ fuit cum crederetur extinctus, donec suo tempore reveletur, et restituatur in regnum." According to the Sibyls, Nero was to make an alliance with the kings of the Medes and Persians; return at the head of a mighty army; accomplish his favourite scheme of digging through the isthmus of Corinth, and then conquer Rome. For the manner in which Neander traces the germ of this notion in the Apocalypse, see Pflanzung, der Chr. Kirche, ii. 327. Nero is Antichrist in the political verses of Commodianus. xli.

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dead, and of the whole world. There shall be wailing and scattering abroad, and ruin, when the fall of the cities shall come, and the abyss of earth shall open."

In another passage, the desolation of Italy, the return of Nero, the general massacre of kings, are pourtrayed in fearful terms. The licentiousness of Rome is detailed in the blackest colours. "Sit silent in thy sorrow, O guilty and luxurious city; the vestal virgins shall no longer watch the sacred fire; thy house is desolate."* Christianity is then represented under the image of a pure and heaven-descending temple, embracing the whole human race.

Whether these prophecies merely embodied, for the private edification, the sentiments of the Christians, they are manifest indications of these sentiments; and they would scarcely be concealed with so much prudence and discretion, as not to transpire among adversaries, who now began to watch them with jealous vigilance: if they were boldly published, for the purpose of converting the Heathen, they would be still more obnoxious to the general indignation and hatred. However the more moderate and rational, probably the greater number, of the Christians might deprecate these dangerous and injudicious effusions of zeal, the consequences would involve all alike in the indiscriminating animosity which they would provoke; and, whether or not these predictions were contained in the Sibylline poems, quoted by all the early writers,

* Lib. v. p. 621.

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by Justin Martyr, by Clement, and by Origen, the attempt to array the authority of the Sibyls against that religion and that empire, of which they were before considered almost the tutelary guardians, would goad the rankling aversion to violent resentment.

The general superiority assumed in any way by Christianity, directly it came into collision with the opposite party, would of itself be fatal to the peace which it had acquired in its earlier obscurity. Of all pretensions, man is most jealous of the claim to moral superiority. II. The darkening aspect of the times wrought up this growing alienation and hatred to open and furious hostility. In the reign of M. Aurelius, we approach the verge of that narrow oasis of peace which intervenes between the final conquests of Rome and the recoil of repressed and threatening barbarism upon the civilisation of the world. The public mind began to be agitated with gloomy rumours from the frontier, while calamities, though local, yet spread over wide districts, shook the whole Roman people with apprehension. Foreign and civil wars, inundations, earthquakes, pestilences, which we shall presently assign to their proper dates, awoke the affrighted empire from its slumber of tranquillity and peace.*

Change in the circumstances of the times.

The Emperor Marcus reposed not, like his predecessor, in his Lanuvian villa, amid the peaceful pursuits of agriculture, or with the great jurisconsults of the time, meditating on a general system of legislation. The days of the second Numa

* Tillemont, Hist. des Emp. ii. 593.

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were gone by, and the philosopher must leave his speculative school and his Stoic friends to place himself at the head of the legions. New levies invade the repose of peaceful families; even the public amusements are encroached upon, the gladiators are enrolled to serve in the army.* It was at this unexpected crisis of calamity and terror, that superstition, which had slept in careless and Epicurean forgetfulness of its gods, suddenly awoke, and when it fled for succour to the altar of the tutelar deity, found the temple deserted and the shrine neglected. One portion of society stood aloof in sullen disregard or avowed contempt of rites so imperiously demanded by the avenging gods. If, in the time of public distress, true religion inspires serene resignation to the Divine will, and receives the awful admonition to more strenuous and rigid virtue; superstition shudders at the manifest anger of the gods, yet looks not within to correct the offensive guilt, but abroad, to discover some gift or sacrifice which may appease the Divine wrath, and bribe back the alienated favour of Heaven. Rarely does it discover any offering sufficiently costly, except human life. The Christians were the public and avowed enemies of the gods; they were the self-designated victims, whose ungrateful atheism had provoked, whose blood might avert, their manifest indignation. The public religious ceremonies, the sacrifices, the games, the theatres, afforded constant opportunities of inflaming and giving vent to the paroxyms of popular fury,

Terror of the Roman world.

* Fuit enim populo hic sermo, cum *sustulisset ad bellum gladiatores* quod populum sublatis voluptatibus vellet cogere ad philosophiam. Jul. Cap. p. 204.

with which it disburdened itself of its awful apprehensions. The cry of "The Christians to the lions!" was now no longer the wanton clamour of individual or party malice; it was not murmured by the interested, and eagerly re-echoed by the blood-thirsty, who rejoiced in the exhibition of unusual victims; it was the deep and general voice of fanatic terror, solemnly demanding the propitiation of the wrathful gods, by the sacrifice of these impious apostates from their worship.* The Christians were the authors of all the calamities which were brooding over the world, and in vain their earnest apologists appealed to the prosperity of the empire, since the appearance of Christ, in the reign of Augustus, and showed that the great enemies of Christianity, the emperors Nero and Domitian, were likewise the scourges of mankind.†

3. The character of the Emperor.

III. Was then the philosopher superior to the vulgar superstition? In what manner did his personal character affect the condition of the Christians? Did he authorise, by any new edict, a general and systematic persecution, or did he only give free scope to the vengeance of the awe-struck people, and countenance the timid or fanatic concessions of the provincial governors to the riotous demand of the populace for Christian blood? Did he actually repeal or suspend, or only neglect to enforce,

* The miracle of the thundering legion (see postea), after having suffered deadly wounds from former assailants, was finally transfixed by the critical spear of Moyle. (Works, vol. ii.) Is it improbable that it was invented or wrought up, from a casual occurrence, into its present form, as a kind of counterpoise to the reiterated charge which was advanced against the Christians, of having caused, by their impiety, all the calamities inflicted by the barbarians on the empire?

† Melito apud Routh, Reliq. Sacr. 1. 111. Compare Tertullian, Apologet. v.

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the milder edicts of his predecessors, which secured to the Christians a fair and public trial before the legal tribunal? * The acts ascribed to Marcus Aurelius, in the meager and unsatisfactory annals of his reign, are at issue with the sentiments expressed in his grave and lofty Meditations. He assumes, in his philosophical lucubrations, which he dictated during his campaigns upon the Danube, the tone of profound religious sentiment, but proudly disclaims the influence of superstition upon his mind. Yet in Rome, he either shared or condescended to appear to share, all the terrors of the people. The pestilence, said to have been introduced from the East by the soldiers, on their return from the Parthian campaign, had not yet ceased its ravages, when the public mind was thrown into a state of the utmost depression by the news of the Marcomannic war. M. Aurelius, as we shall hereafter see, did not, in his proper person, countenance, to the utmost, the demands of the popular superstition. For all the vulgar arts of magic, divination, and vaticination, the Emperor declares his sovereign contempt; yet on that occasion, besides the public religious ceremonies, to which we shall presently allude, he is said himself to have tampered with the dealers in the secrets of futurity; to have lent a willing ear to the prognostications of the Chaldeans, and to the calculations

* There is an edict of the Emperor Aurelian in the genuine acts of St. Symphorian, in which Pagi, Ruinart, and Neander (i. 106.), would read the name of M. Aurelius instead of Aurelianus. Their arguments are, in my opinion, inconclusive, and the fact that Aurelian is named among the persecuting Emperors in the treatise ascribed to Lactantius (de Mort. Persecutor.), in which his edicts (scripta) against the Christians are distinctly named, outweighs their conjectural objections.

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of astrology. If these facts be true, and all this was not done in mere compliance with the general sentiment, the serene composure of Marcus himself may at times have darkened into terror; his philosophic apathy may not always have been exempt from the influence of shuddering devotion. In issuing an edict against the Christians, Marcus may have supposed that he was consulting the public good, by conciliating the alienated favour of the gods. But the superiority of the Christians to all the terrors of death appears at once to have astonished and wounded the Stoic pride of the Emperor. Philosophy, which was constantly dwelling on the solemn question of the immortality of the soul, could not comprehend the eager resolution with which the Christian departed from life; and in the bitterness of jealousy sought out unworthy motives for the intrepidity which it could not emulate. "How great is that soul which is ready, if it must depart from the body, to be extinguished, to be dispersed, or still to subsist! and this readiness must proceed from the individual judgment, not from mere obstinacy, like the Christians, but deliberately, solemnly, and without tragic display."* The Emperor did not choose to discern that it was in the one case the doubt, in the other the as-

Private sentiments of the Emperor, in his Meditations.

* The Emperor's Greek is by no means clear in this remarkable passage. Ψιλὴν παράταξιν is usually translated as in the text "mere obstinacy." A recent writer renders it "ostentation or parade." I suspect an antithesis with ἰδικῆς κρίσεως, and that it refers to the manner in which the Christians *arrayed* themselves as a body against the authority of the persecutors; and should render the words omitted in the text ὥστε καὶ ἄλλον πεῖσαι, and without that tragic display which is intended to persuade others to follow our example. The Stoic pride would stand alone in the dignity of an intrepid death.

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surance, of the eternal destiny of the soul, which constituted the difference. Marcus, no doubt, could admire, not merely the dignity with which the philosopher might depart on his uncertain but necessary disembarkation from the voyage of life, and the bold and fearless valour with which his own legionaries or their barbarous antagonists could confront death on the field of battle; but, at the height of his wisdom, he could not comprehend the exalted enthusiasm with which the Christian trusted in the immortality and blessedness of the departed soul in the presence of God.

There can be little doubt that Marcus Antoninus issued an edict by which the Christians were again exposed to all the denunciations of common informers, whose zeal was now whetted by some share, if not by the whole, of the confiscated property of delinquents. The most distinguished Christians of the East were sacrificed to the base passions of the meanest of mankind, by the Emperor, who, with every moral qualification to appreciate the new religion, closed his ears, either in the stern apathy of Stoic philosophy, or the more engrossing terrors of Heathen bigotry.

It is remarkable how closely the more probable records of Christian martyrology harmonise with the course of events, during the whole reign of M. Aurelius, and illustrate and justify our view of the causes and motives of their persecution.*

* A modern writer, M. Ripault (Hist. Philosophique de Marc Aurele), ascribes to this time the memorable passage of Tertullian's Apology—"Existiment omnis publicæ cladis, omnis popularis incommodi, Christianos esse causam. Si Tiberis *ascendit in mœnia*, si Nilus

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It was on the 7th March, 161, that the elder Antoninus, in the charitable words of a Christian apologist, sunk in death into the sweetest sleep *, and M. Aurelius assumed the reins of empire. He immediately associated with himself the other adopted son of Antonine, who took the name of L. Verus. One treacherous year of peace gave the hope of undisturbed repose, under the beneficent sway which carried the maxims of a severe and humane philosophy into the administration of public affairs. Mild to all lighter delinquencies, but always ready to mitigate the severity of the law; the Emperor was only inexorable to those more heinous offences which endanger the happiness of society. While the Emperor himself superintended the course of justice, the senate resumed its ancient honours. The second year of his reign, the horizon began to darken. During the reign of the first Antonine, earthquakes, which shook down some of the Asiatic cities, and fires, which ravaged those of the West, had excited considerable alarm; but these calamities assumed a more dire and destructive character during the reign of Aurelius. Rome itself was first visited with a terrible inundation.† The Tiber swept away all the cattle in the neighbourhood, threw down a great number of

A. D. 161.

A. D. 162.

non ascendit in arva, si cælum stetit, *si terra movit, si fames, si lues*, statim Christianos ad leones." Tout ce qui suit les cultes de l'empire, s'éléve de toutes parts contre les Chrétiens. On attribue a ce qu'on appelle leur impiété, le déchaînement des fléaux, sous lesquelles gémissent tous les hommes sans privilége ni exemption, sans distinction de réligion. ii. 86. Tillemont, Hist. des Emp. ii. 609.

* Quadratus apud Xiphilin. Antonin. 3.

† Capitol. M. Antonin. p. 168.

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buildings; among the rest, the magazines and granaries of corn, which were chiefly situated on the banks of the river. This appalling event was followed by a famine, which pressed heavily on the poorer population of the capital. At the same time, disturbances took place in Britain; the Catti, a German tribe, ravaged Belgium; and the Parthian war, which commenced under most disastrous circumstances, the invasion of Syria, and the loss of three legions, demanded the presence of his colleague in the empire. Though the event was announced to be prosperous, yet intelligence of doubtful and hard-won victories seemed to intimate that the spell of Roman conquest was beginning to lose its power.* After four years, Verus returned, bearing the trophies of victory; but, at the same time, the seeds of a calamity, which outweighed all the barren honours which he had won on the shores of the Euphrates. His army was infected with a pestilence, which superstition ascribed to the plunder of a temple in Seleucia or Babylonia. The rapacious soldiers had opened a mystic coffer, inscribed with magical signs, from which issued a pestilential air, which laid waste the whole world. This fable is a vivid indication of the state of the public mind.† More rational observation traced the fatal malady from Ethiopia, and Egypt

A. D. 166. Calamities of the empire.

* Sed in diebus Parthici belli, persecutiones Christianorum, quartâ jam post Neronem vice, in Asiâ et Galliâ graves præcepto ejus extiterunt, multique sanctorum martyrio coronati sunt. This loose language of Orosius (for the persecution in Gaul, if not in Asia, was much later than the Parthian war), appears to connect the calamities of Rome with the persecutions.

† This was called the annus calamitosus. There is a strange story in Capitolinus of an impostor who harangued the populace, from the wild fig-tree in the Campus Martius, and asserted that if, in throwing himself from the tree, h e

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to the Eastern army, which it followed from province to province, mouldering away its strength as it proceeded, even to the remote frontiers of Gaul and the northern shores of the Rhine. Italy felt its most dreadful ravages, and in Rome itself the dead bodies were transported out of the city not on the decent bier, but heaped up in waggons. Famine aggravated the miseries, and, perhaps, increased the virulence, of the plague.* Still the hopes of peace began to revive the drooping mind; and flattering medals were struck, which promised the return of golden days. On a sudden, the empire was appalled with the intelligence of new wars in all quarters. The Moors laid waste the fertile provinces of Spain; a rebellion of shepherds withheld the harvests of Egypt from the capital. Their defeat only added to the dangerous glory of Avidius Cassius, who, before long, stood forth as a competitor for the empire. A vast confederacy of nations, from the frontiers of Gaul to the borders of Illyricum, comprehending some of the best-known and most formidable of the German tribes, with others, whose dissonant races were new to the Roman ears, had arisen with a simultaneous movement.† The armies were wasted with the Parthian campaigns, and the still more destructive plague. The Marcomannic has been compared with the second Punic war, though, at the time, even in the paroxysm of terror,

should be turned into a stork, fire would fall from heaven, and the *end of the world was at hand*,—ignem de cælo lapsurum finemque mundi affore diceret. As he fell, he loosed a stork from his bosom. Aurelius, on his confession of the imposture, released him. Cap. Anton. 13.

* Julius Cap. Ant. Phil. 21.

† See the List in Capitol. p. 200.

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the pride of Rome would probably not have ennobled an irruption of barbarians, however formidable, by such a comparison. The presence of both the Emperors was immediately demanded. Marcus, indeed, lingered in Rome, probably to enrol the army; (for which purpose he swept together recruits from all quarters, and even robbed the arena of its bravest gladiators,) certainly to perform the most solemn and costly religious ceremonies. Every rite was celebrated which could propitiate the Divine favour, or allay the popular fears. Priests were summoned from all quarters; foreign rites performed*; lustrations and funereal banquets for seven days purified the infected city. It was, no doubt, on this occasion that the unusual number of victims provoked the sarcastic wit, which insinuated that if the Emperor returned victorious, there would be a dearth of oxen.† Precisely at this time, the Christian martyrologies date the commencement of the persecution under Aurelius. In Rome itself, Justin, the apologist of Christianity, either the same or the following year, ratified with his blood the sincerity of his belief in the doctrines for which he had abandoned the Gentile philosophy. His death is attributed to the jealousy

Christian martyrdoms. A. D. 166.

* Peregrinos ritus *impleverit*. Such seems the uncontested reading in the Augustan history; yet the singular fact that at such a period the Emperor should introduce foreign rites, as well as the unusual expression, may raise a suspicion that some word, with an opposite meaning, is the genuine expression of the author.

† This early pasquinade was couched in the form of an address from the white oxen to the Emperor. If you conquer, we are undone. Οἱ *βόες οἱ λευκοὶ Μαρκῷ τῷ Καίσαρι, ἂν δὲ συ νικήσῃς, ἡμεῖς ἀπωλόμεθα.* Amm. Marc. XXV. 4.

of Crescens, a Cynic, whose audience had been drawn off by the more attractive tenets of the Christian Platonist. Justin was summoned before Rusticus, one of the philosophic teachers of Aurelius, the prefect of the city, and commanded to perform sacrifice. On his refusal, and open avowal of his Christianity, he was scourged, and put to death. It is by no means improbable that, during this crisis of religious terror, mandates should have been issued to the provinces to imitate the devotion of the capital, and every where to appease the offended gods by sacrifice. Such an edict, though not designating them by name, would, in its effects, and perhaps in intention, expose the Christians to the malice of their enemies. Even if the provincial governors were left of their own accord to imitate the example of the Emperor, their own zeal or loyalty would induce them to fall in with the popular current; and the lofty humanity which would be superior at once to superstition, to interest, and to the desire of popularity, which would neglect the opportunity of courting the favour of the Emperor and the populace, would be a rare and singular virtue upon the tribunal of a provincial ruler.

Persecution in Asia Minor.

The persecution raged with the greatest violence in Asia Minor. It was here that the new edicts were promulgated, so far departing from the humane regulations of the former Emperors, that the prudent apologists venture to doubt their emanating from the imperial authority.* By these rescripts,

* Melito apud Euseb. E. H. iv. 20.

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the delators were again let loose, and were stimulated by the gratification of their rapacity as well as of their revenge, out of the forfeited goods of the Christian victims of persecution.

Polycarp.

The fame of the aged Polycarp, whose death the sorrowing church of Smyrna related in an epistle to the Christian community at Philomelium or Philadelphia, which is still extant, and bears every mark of authenticity *, has obscured that of the other victims of Heathen malice or superstition. Of these victims, the names of two only have survived; one who manfully endured, the other who timidly apostatised in the hour of trial. Germanicus appeared; was forced to descend into the arena; he fought gallantly, until the merciful Proconsul entreated him to consider his time of life. He then provoked the tardy beast, and in an instant obtained his immortality. The impression on the wondering people was that of indignation rather than pity. The cry was redoubled, "Away with the godless! let Polycarp be apprehended!" The second, Quintus, a Phrygian, had boastfully excited the rest to throw themselves in the way of the persecution. He descended, in his haste, into the arena; the first sight of the wild-beasts so overcame his hollow courage, that he consented to sacrifice.

Polycarp was the most distinguished Christian of the East; he had heard the Apostle St. John; he had long presided, with the most saintly dignity, over the see of Smyrna. Polycarp neither ostentatiously exposed himself, nor declined such measures for security as might be consistent with his character. He

* In Cotelerii Patres Apostolici, ii. 195.

consented to retire into a neighbouring village, from which, on the intelligence of the approach of the officers, he retreated to another. His place of concealment being betrayed by two slaves, whose confession had been extorted by torture, he exclaimed, "The will of God be done;" ordered food to be prepared for the officers of justice; and requested time for prayer, in which he spent two hours. He was placed upon an ass, and on a day of great public concourse, conducted towards the town. He was met by Herod the Irenarch, and his father Nicetas, who took him, with considerate respect, into their own carriage, and vainly endeavoured to persuade him to submit to the two tests by which the Christians were tried, the salutation of the Emperor by the title of Lord, and sacrifice. On his determinate refusal, their compassion gave place to contumely; he was hastily thrust out of the chariot, and conducted to the crowded stadium. On the entrance of the old man upon the public scene, the excited devotion of the Christian spectators imagined that they heard a voice from heaven, "Polycarp, be firm!" The Heathen, in their vindictive fury, shouted aloud, that Polycarp had been apprehended. The merciful Proconsul entreated him, in respect to his old age, to disguise his name. He proclaimed aloud that he was Polycarp; the trial proceeded. "Swear," they said, "by the Genius of Cæsar; retract, and say, away with the godless." The old man gazed in sorrow at the frantic and raging benches of the spectators, rising above each other, and with his eyes uplifted to heaven, said, "Away with the godless!" The Proconsul urged

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him further—"Swear, and I release thee; blaspheme Christ." "Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me an injury; how can I blaspheme my King, and my Saviour?" The Proconsul again commanded him to swear by the Genius of Cæsar. Polycarp replied, by avowing himself a Christian, and by requesting a day to be appointed on which he might explain before the Proconsul the blameless tenets of Christianity. "Persuade the people to consent," replied the compassionate, but overawed ruler. "We owe respect to authority; to thee I will explain the reasons of my conduct, to the populace I will make no explanation." The old man knew too well the ferocious passions raging in their minds, which it had been vain to attempt to allay by the rational arguments of Christianity. The Proconsul threatened to expose him to the wild beasts. "'Tis well for me to be speedily released from this life of misery." He threatened to burn him alive. "I fear not the fire that burns for a moment; thou knowest not that which burns for ever and ever." His countenance was full of peace and joy, even when the herald advanced into the midst of the assemblage, and thrice proclaimed—"Polycarp has professed himself a Christian." The Jews and Heathens (for the former were in great numbers, and especially infuriated against the Christians) replied with an overwhelming shout, "This is the teacher of all Asia, the overthrower of our gods, who has perverted so many from sacrifice and the adoration of the gods." They demanded of the Asiarch, the president of the games, instantly to let loose a lion upon Poly-

carp. He excused himself by alleging that the games were over. A general cry arose that Polycarp should be burned alive. The Jews were again as vindictively active as the Heathens in collecting the fuel of the baths, and other combustibles, to raise up a hasty yet capacious funeral pile. He was speedily unrobed; he requested not to be nailed to the stake; he was only bound to it.

The calm and unostentatious prayer of Polycarp may be considered as embodying the sentiments of the Christians of that period. "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and ever blessed Son Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the knowledge of thee; the God of angels, powers, and of every creature, and of the whole race of the righteous who live before thee, I thank thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and this hour, that I may receive a portion in the number of thy martyrs, and drink of Christ's cup, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of body and soul, in the incorruptibleness of the Holy Spirit; among whom may I be admitted this day, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as thou, O true and faithful God, hast prepared, and foreshown and accomplished. Wherefore I praise thee for all thy mercies; I bless thee; I glorify thee, with the eternal and heavenly Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, to whom, with thee and the Holy Spirit, be glory now and for ever."

The fire was kindled in vain. It arose curving like an arch around the serene victim, or, like a sail swelling with the wind, left the body unharmed. To the sight of the Christians, he re-

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sembled a treasure of gold or silver (an allusion to the gold tried in the furnace); and delicious odours, as of myrrh or frankincense, breathed from his body. An executioner was sent in to despatch the victim; his side was pierced, and blood enough flowed from the aged body to extinguish the flames immediately around him.*

The whole of this narrative has the simple energy of truth: the prudent yet resolute conduct of the aged bishop; the calm and dignified expostulation of the governor; the wild fury of the populace; the Jews eagerly seizing the opportunity of renewing their unslaked hatred to the Christian name, are described with the simplicity of nature. The supernatural part of the transaction is no more than may be ascribed to the high-wrought imagination of the Christian spectators, deepening every casual incident into a wonder. The voice from heaven, heard only by Christian ears; the flame from the hastily piled wood, arching over the unharmed body; the grateful odours, not impossibly from aromatic woods, which were used to warm the baths of the more luxurious, and which were collected for the sudden execution; the effusion of blood†, which might excite wonder from the decrepit frame of a man at least a hundred years old. Even the vision of Polycarp himself‡, by which he

* The Greek account adds a dove, which soared from his body, as it were his innocent departing soul. For *περίστερα* however has been very ingeniously substituted *απ' αριστερά*. See Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, i. 316.

† According to the great master of nature, Lady Macbeth's diseased memory is haunted with a similar circumstance, at the murder of Duncan. "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him." Macbeth, act v. s. 1.

‡ The difficulty of accurately

was forewarned of his approaching fate, was not unlikely to arise before his mind at that perilous crisis. Polycarp closed the nameless train of Asiatic martyrs. *

Some few years after, the city of Smyrna was visited with a terrible earthquake; a generous sympathy was displayed by the inhabitants of the neighbouring cities; provisions were poured in from all quarters; homes were offered to the houseless; carriages furnished to convey the infirm and the children from the scene of ruin. They received them as if they had been their parents or children. The rich and the poor vied in the offices of charity; and, in the words of the Grecian sophist, thought that they were receiving rather than confering a favour. † A Christian historian may be excused if he discerns in this humane conduct the manifest progress of Christian benevolence; and that benevolence, if not unfairly ascribed to the influence of Christianity, is heightened by the recollection that the sufferers were those whose amphitheatre had so recently been stained with the blood of the aged martyr. If, instead of beholding the retributive hand of divine vengeance in the smouldering ruins of the city, they hastened to alleviate the common miseries of Christian and of Pagan, with equal zeal and liberality, it is impossible not to trace at once the

reconciling the vision with its fulfilment has greatly perplexed the writers who insist on its preternatural origin. Jortin, p. 307.

* Κατέπαυσε τὸν διωγμὸν.

† Tillemont, Hist. des Emp. ii. p. 687. The philosopher Aristides wrote an oration on this event.

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extraordinary revolution in the sentiments of mankind, and the purity of the Christianity which was thus so superior to those passions which have so often been fatal to its perfection.

At this period of enthusiastic excitement— of superstition on the one hand, returning in unreasoning terror to its forsaken gods, and working itself up by every means to a consolatory feeling of the divine protection; of religion, on the other, relying in humble confidence on the protection of an all-ruling Providence; when the religious parties were, it might seem, aggrandising their rival deities, and tracing their conflicting powers throughout the whole course of human affairs; to every mind each extraordinary event would be deeply coloured with supernatural influence; and whenever any circumstance really bore a providential or miraculous appearance, it would be ascribed by each party to the favouring interposition of its own god.

Miracle of the thundering legion.

Such was the celebrated event which was long current in Christian history as the legend of the thundering legion.* Heathen historians, medals still extant, and the column which bears the name of Antoninus at Rome, concur with Christian tradition in commemorating the extraordinary deliverance of the Roman army, during the war with the German nations, from a situation of the utmost peril and difficulty. If the Christians at any time served in the imperial armies† — if military service

* See Moyle's Works, vol. ii. Compare Routh, Reliq. Sacræ, i. 153., with authors quoted.

† Tertullian, in a passage already quoted, states distinctly *militamus* vobiscum.

was a question, as seems extremely probable, which divided the early Christians*, some considering it too closely connected with the idolatrous practices of an oath to the fortunes of Cæsar, and the worship of the standards, which were to the rest of the army, as it were, the household gods of battle; while others were less rigid in their practice, and forgot their piety in their allegiance to their sovereign, and their patriotism to their country; at no time were the Christians more likely to overcome their scruples than at this critical period. The armies were recruited by unprecedented means; and many Christians, who would before have hesitated to enroll themselves, might less reluctantly submit to the conscription, or even think themselves justified in engaging in what appeared necessary and defensive warfare. There might then have been many Christians in the armies of M. Aurelius, — but that they formed a whole separate legion, is manifestly the fiction of a later age. In the campaign of the year 174, the army advanced incautiously into a country entirely without water; and, in this faint and enfeebled state, was exposed to a formidable attack of the whole barbarian force. Suddenly, at their hour of most extreme distress, a copious and refreshing rain came down, which supplied their wants; and while their half recruited strength was still ill able to oppose the onset of the enemy, a tremendous storm, with lightning and hailstones of an enormous size,

* Neander has developed this notion with his usual ability, in this part of his History of the Church.

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drove full upon the adversary, and rendered his army an easy conquest to the reviving Romans.* Of this awful, yet seasonable interposition, the whole army acknowledged the preternatural, the divine, origin. By those of darker superstition, it was attributed to the incantations of the magician Arnuphis, who controlled the elements to the service of the Emperor. The medals struck on the occasion, and the votive column erected by Marcus himself, render homage to the established deities, to Mercury and to Jupiter.† The more rational Pagans, with a flattery which received the suffrage of admiring posterity, gave the honour to the virtues of Marcus, which demanded this signal favour from approving Heaven.‡ The Christian, of course, looked alone to that one Almighty God whose providence ruled the whole course of nature, and saw the secret operation of his own prayers meeting with the favourable acceptance of the Most High.§ "While the Pagans ascribed the honour of this deliverance to their own Jove," writes Tertullian, "they unknowingly bore testimony to the Christian's God."

* In the year after this victory (A. D. 175.), the formidable rebellion of Avidius Cassius disturbed the East, and added to the perils and embarrassments of the empire.

† Mercury, according to Pagi, appears on one of the coins relating to this event. Compare Reading's note in Routh, l. c.

‡ Lampridius (in vit.) attributes the victory to the Chaldeans. Marcus, de Seipso (l. i. c. 6.), allows that he had the magician Arnuphis in his army.

Chaldæa mago ceu carmina ritu
Armavere Deos, seu, quod reor, omne Tonantis
Obsequium Marci mores potuere mereri.
Claud. vi. Cons. Hon.

§ In Jovis nomine Deo nostro testimonium reddidit. Tertullian ad Scapulam, p. 20. Euseb. Hist. Eccl. v. 5.

The latter end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius* was signalised by another scene of martyrdom, in a part of the empire far distant from that where persecution had before raged with the greatest violence, though not altogether disconnected from it by the original descent of the sufferers. †

Martyrs of Vienne. A. D. 177.

The Christians of Lyons and Vienne appear to have been a religious colony from Asia Minor or Phrygia, and to have maintained a close correspondence with those distant communities. There is something remarkable in the connection between these regions and the East. To this district the two Herods, Archelaus and Herod Antipas, were successively banished; and it is singular enough, that Pontius Pilate, after his recall from Syria, was exiled to the same neighbourhood.

There now appears a Christian community, corresponding in Greek with the mother church.‡ It is by no means improbable that a kind of Jewish settlement of the attendants on the banished sovereigns of Judæa might have been formed in the neighbourhood of Vienne and Lyons, and maintained a friendly, no doubt a mercantile, connection with their opulent brethren of Asia Minor, per-

* If we had determined to force the events of this period into an accordance with our own view of the persecutions of M. Aurelius, we might have adopted the chronology of Dodwell, who assigns the martyrs of Lyons to the year 167; but the evidence seems in favour of the later date, 177. See Mosheim. Lardner, who, if not by his critical sagacity, commands authority by his scrupulous honesty, says, "Nor do I expect that any learned man, who has a concern for his reputation as a writer, should attempt a direct confutation of this opinion." Works, 4to edit. i. 360.

† Euseb. Ecc. Hist. v. 1.

‡ Epistola Viennensium et Lugdunensium, in Routh, i. 265.

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haps through the port of Marseilles. Though Christianity does not appear to have penetrated into Gaul till rather a late period*, it may have travelled by the same course, and have been propagated in the Jewish settlement by converts from Phrygia or Asia Minor. Its Jewish origin is, perhaps, confirmed by its adherence to the Judæo-Christian tenet of abstinence from blood.†

The commencement of this dreadful, though local persecution, was an ebullition of popular fury. It was about the period when the German war, which had slumbered during some years of precarious peace, again threatened to disturb the repose of the empire. Southern Gaul, though secure beyond the Rhine, was yet at no great distance from the incursions of the German tribes; and it is possible that personal apprehensions might mingle with the general fanatic terror, which exasperated the Heathens against their Christian fellow-citizens. The Christians were on a sudden exposed to a general attack of the populace. Clamours soon grew to personal violence; they were struck, dragged about the streets, plundered, stoned, shut up in their houses, until the more merciful hostility of the ruling authorities gave orders for their arrest and imprisonment until the arrival of the governor. One man of birth and rank, Vettius Epagathus, boldly undertook their defence against

* Serius Alpes transgressa, is the expression of a Christian writer, Sulpicius Severus.

† "How can those eat infants to whom it is not lawful to eat the blood of brutes?" Compare, however, Tertullian's Apology, ch. 9., and Origen contra Celsum, viii.; from whence it appears that this abstinence was more general among the early Christians.

the vague charges of atheism and impiety: he was charged with being himself a Christian, and fearlessly admitted the honourable accusation. The greater part of the Christian community adhered resolutely to their belief; the few whose courage failed in the hour of trial, and who purchased their security by shameful submission, nevertheless did not abandon their more courageous and suffering brethren; but, at considerable personal danger, continued to alleviate their sufferings by kindly offices. Some Heathen slaves were at length compelled, by the dread of torture, to confirm the odious charges which were so generally advanced against the Christians: — banquets on human flesh; promiscuous and incestuous concubinage; Thyestean feasts, and Œdipodean weddings. The extorted confessions of these miserable men exasperated even the more moderate of the Heathens, while the ferocious populace had now free scope for their sanguinary cruelty. The more distinguished victims were Sanctus, a deacon of Vienne; a new convert named Maturus, and Attalus, of Phrygian descent, from the city of Pergamus. They were first tortured by means too horrible to describe — if, without such description, the barbarity of the persecutors, and the heroic endurance of the Christian martyrs, could be justly represented. Many perished in the suffocating air of the noisome dungeons, many had their feet strained to dislocation in the stocks; the more detested victims, after every other means of torture were exhausted, had hot plates of iron

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placed upon the most sensitive parts of their bodies.

Among these victims was the aged Bishop of Lyons, Pothinus, now in his ninetieth year, who died in prison after two days, from the ill usage which he had received from the populace. His feeble body had failed, but his mind remained intrepid; when the frantic rabble environed him with their insults, and demanded, with contumelious cries, "Who is the God of the Christians?" he calmly replied, "Wert thou worthy, thou shouldst know."

But the amphitheatre was the great public scene of popular barbarity and of Christian endurance. They were exposed to wild-beasts, which, however, do not seem to have been permitted to despatch their miserable victims, and made to sit in a heated iron chair, till their flesh reeked upwards with an offensive odour.

A rescript of the Emperor, instead of allaying the popular frenzy, gave ample license to its uncontrolled violence. Those who denied the faith were to be released; those who persisted in it, condemned to death.

Martyrdom of Blandina.

But the most remarkable incident in this fearful and afflicting scene, and the most characteristic of the social change which Christianity had begun to work, was this, that the chief honours of this memorable martyrdom were assigned to a female and a slave. Even the Christians themselves scarcely appear aware of the deep and universal influence of their own sublime doctrines. The mistress of Blandina,

herself a martyr, trembled lest the weak body and, still more, the debased condition of the lowly associate in her trial, might betray her to criminal concession. Blandina shared in all the most excruciating sufferings of the most distinguished victims; she equalled them in the calm and unpretending superiority to every pain which malice, irritated and licensed, as it were, to exceed, if it were possible, its own barbarities on the person of a slave, could invent. She was selected by the peculiar vengeance of the persecutors, whose astonishment probably increased their malignity, for new and unprecedented tortures, which she bore with the same equable magnanimity.

Blandina was first led forth with Sanctus, Maturus, and Attalus; and, no doubt, the ignominy of their public exposure was intended to be heightened by their association with a slave. The wearied executioners wondered that her life could endure during the horrid succession of torments which they inflicted. Blandina's only reply was, "I am a Christian, and no wickedness is practised among us."

In the amphitheatre, she was suspended to a stake, while the combatants, Maturus and Sanctus, derived vigour and activity from the tranquil prayers which she uttered in her agony; and the less savage wild-beasts kept aloof from their prey. A third time she was brought forth, as a public exhibition of suffering, with a youth of fifteen, named Ponticus. During every kind of torment, her language and her example animated the cou-

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rage and confirmed the endurance of the boy, who at length expired under the torture. Blandina rejoiced at the approach of death, as if she had been invited to a wedding banquet, and not thrown to the wild-beasts. She was at length released. After she had been scourged, placed in the iron chair, enclosed in a net, and, now in a state of insensibility, tossed by a bull, some more merciful barbarian transpierced her with a sword. The remains of all these martyrs, after remaining long unburied, were cast into the Rhone, in order to mock and render still more improbable their hopes of a resurrection.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOURTH PERIOD. CHRISTIANITY UNDER THE SUCCESSORS OF M. AURELIUS.

Fourth period.

SUCH was the state of Christianity at the commencement of the fourth period, between its first promulgation and its establishment under Constantine. The golden days of the Roman empire had already begun to darken, and closed for ever with the reign of Marcus the philosopher. The empire of the world became the prize of bold adventure, or the precarious gift of a lawless soldiery. During little more than a century, from the accession of Commodus to that of Dioclesian, more than twenty Emperors (not to mention the pageants of a day, and the competitors for the throne, who retained a temporary authority over some single province) flitted like shadows along the tragic scene of the imperial palace. A long line of military adventurers, often strangers to the name, to the race, to the language of Rome, — Africans and Syrians, Arabs and Goths, — seized the quickly shifting sceptre of the world. The change of sovereign was almost always a change of dynasty, or, by some strange fatality, every attempt to re-establish an hereditary succession was thwarted by the vices or imbecility of the second generation. M. Aurelius is succeeded by the brutal Commodus; the vigorous and

Rapid succession of Emperors. A. D. 180. to 284.

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able Severus by the fratricide Caracalla. One of the imperial historians has made the melancholy observation, that of the great men of Rome scarcely one left a son the heir of his virtues; they had either died without offspring, or had left such heirs, that it had been better for mankind if they had died leaving no posterity.*

Insecurity of the throne favourable to Christianity.

In the weakness and insecurity of the throne lay the strength and safety of Christianity. During such a period, no systematic policy was pursued in any of the leading internal interests of the empire. It was a government of temporary expedients, of individual passions. The first and commanding object of each succeeding head of a dynasty was to secure his contested throne, and to centre upon himself the wavering or divided allegiance of the provinces. Many of the Emperors were deeply and inextricably involved in foreign wars, and had no time to devote to the social changes within the pale of the empire. The tumults or the terrors of German, or Gothic, or Persian inroad, effected a perpetual diversion from the slow and silent internal aggressions of Christianity. The frontiers constantly and imperiously demanded the presence of the Emperor, and left him no leisure to attend to the feeble remonstrances of the neglected priesthood: the dangers of the civil absorbed those of the religious constitution. Thus Christianity had another century of regular and progressive advance-

* Neminem prope magnorum virorum optimum et utilem filium reliquisse satis claret. Denique aut sine liberis viri interierunt, aut tales habuerunt plerique, ut meliùs fuerit de rebus humanis sine posteritate discedere. Spartiani Severus, Aug. Hist. p. 360.

ment to arm itself for the inevitable collision with the temporal authority, till, in the reign of Dioclesian, it had grown far beyond the power of the most unlimited and arbitrary despotism to arrest its invincible progress; and Constantine, whatever the motives of his conversion, no doubt adopted a wise and judicious policy, in securing the alliance, rather than continuing the strife, with an adversary which divided the wealth, the intellect, if not the property and the population, of the empire.

Causes of persecutions during this period.

The persecutions which took place during this interval were the hasty consequences of the personal hostility of the Emperors, not the mature and deliberate policy of a regular and permanent government. In general, the vices and the detestable characters of the persecutors would tend to vindicate the innocence of Christianity; and to enlist the sympathies of mankind in its favour, rather than to deepen the general animosity. Christianity, which had received the respectful homage of Alexander Severus, could not lose in public estimation by being exposed to the gladiatorial fury of Maximin. Some of the Emperors were almost as much strangers to the gods as to the people and to the senate of Rome. They seemed to take a reckless delight in violating the ancient majesty of the Roman religion. Foreign superstitions, almost equally new, and scarcely less offensive to the general sentiment, received the public, the pre-eminent, homage of the Emperor. Commodus, though the Grecian Hercules was at once his model, his type, and his deity, was an ardent votary of the Isiac

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mysteries; and at the Syrian worship of the Sun, in all its foreign and oriental pomp, Elagabalus commanded the attendance of the trembling senate.

Commodus. A. D. 180 to 193.

If Marcus Aurelius was, as it were, the last effort of expiring Polytheism, or rather of ancient philosophy, to produce a perfect man, according to the highest ideal conception of human reason, the brutal Commodus might appear to retrograde to the savage periods of society. Commodus was a gladiator on the throne; and if the mind, humanised either by the milder spirit of the times, or by the incipient influence of Christianity, had begun to turn in distaste from the horrible spectacles which flooded the arena with human carnage, the disgust would be immeasurably deepened by the appearance of the Emperor as the chief actor in these sanguinary scenes. Even Nero's theatrical exhibitions had something of the elegance of a polished age; the actor in one of the noble tragedies of ancient Greece, or even the accomplished musician, might derogate from the dignity of an Emperor, yet might, in some degree, excuse the unseemliness of his pursuits by their intellectual character. But the amusements and public occupations of Commodus had long been consigned by the general contempt and abhorrence to the meanest of mankind, to barbarians and slaves; and were as debasing to the civilised man as unbecoming in the head of the empire.* The courage which Commodus displayed in confronting the hundred lions which were let loose in the arena, and fell by

* Ælii Lampridii, Commodus, in August. Hist.

his shafts (though in fact the imperial person was carefully guarded against real dangers), and the skill with which he clave with an arrow the slender neck of the giraffe, might have commanded the admiration of a flattering court. But when he appeared as a gladiator, gloried in the acts, and condescended to receive the disgraceful pay of a profession so infamous as to degrade for ever the man of rank or character who had been forced upon the stage by the tyranny of former Emperors, the courtiers, who had been bred in the severe and dignified school of the philosopher, must have recoiled with shame, and approved, if not envied, the more rigid principles of the Christians, which kept them aloof from such degrading spectacles. Commodus was an avowed proselyte of the Egyptian religion, but his favourite god was the Grecian Hercules. He usurped the attributes and placed his own head on the statues of this deity, which was the impersonation, as it were, of brute force and corporeal strength. But a deity which might command adoration in a period of primæval barbarism, when man lives in a state of perilous warfare with the beasts of the forest, in a more intellectual age sinks to his proper level. He might be the appropriate god of a gladiator, but not of a Roman Emperor.*

* In the new fragments of Dion Cassius recovered by M. Mai there is an epigram pointed against the assumption of the attributes of Hercules by Commodus. The Emperor had placed his own head on the colossal statue of Hercules, with the inscription—Lucius Commodus Hercules.

Διὸς παῖς Καλλίπαις Ἡρακλῆς,
Οὐκ εἰμὶ Λιὸς, ἀλλ' ἀναγκάζουσί με.

The point is not very clear, but it seems to be a protest of the God against being confounded with the Emperor. Mai, Fragm. Vatic. ii. 225.

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Every thing which tended to desecrate the popular religion to the feelings of the more enlightened and intellectual must have strengthened the cause of Christianity; the more the weaker parts of Paganism, and those most alien to the prevailing sentiment of the times, were obtruded on the public view, the more they must have contributed to the advancement of that faith which was rapidly attaining to the full growth of a rival to the established religion. The subsequent deification of Commodus, under the reign of Severus, in wanton resentment against the senate*, prevented his odious memory from sinking into oblivion. His insults upon the more rational part of the existing religion could no longer be forgotten, as merely emanating from his personal character. Commodus advanced into a god, after his death, brought disrepute upon the whole Polytheism of the empire. Christianity was perpetually, as it were, at hand, and ready to profit by every favourable juncture. By a singular accident, the ruffian Commodus was personally less inimically disposed to the Christians than his wise and amiable father. His favourite concubine, Martia, in some manner connected with the Christians, mitigated the barbarity of his temper, and restored to the persecuted Christians a long and unbroken peace, which had been perpetually interrupted by the hostility of the populace, and the edicts of the government in the former reign. Christianity had no doubt been rigidly repelled

* Spartiani Severus, Hist. Aug. p. 345.

from the precincts of the court during the life of Marcus, by the predominance of the philosophic faction. From this period, a Christian party occasionally appears in Rome: many families of distinction and opulence professed Christian tenets, and it is sometimes found in connection with the imperial family. Still Rome, to the last, seems to have been the centre of the Pagan interest, though other causes will hereafter appear for this curious fact in the conflict of the two religions.

Reign of Severus. A. D. 194. to 210.

Severus wielded the sceptre of the world with the vigour of the older empire. But his earlier years were occupied in the establishment of his power over the hostile factions of his competitors, and by his Eastern wars; his later by the settlement of the remote province of Britain.* Severus was at one time the protector, at another the persecutor, of Christianity. Local circumstances appear to have influenced his conduct, on both occasions, to the Christian party. A Christian named Proculus, a dependent, probably, upon his favourite freed slave Evodus, had been so fortunate as to restore him to health by anointing him with oil, and was received into the imperial family, in which he retained his honourable situation till his death. Not improbably through the same connection, a Christian nurse and a Christian preceptor formed the disposition of the young Caracalla; and, till the natural ferocity of his character ripened under the fatal influence of jealous ambition, fraternal hatred, and unbounded power, the gentle-

Infancy of Caracalla.

* Compare Tillemont, Hist. des Empereurs, iii. part 1. p. 146.

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ness of his manners, and the sweetness of his temper, enchanted and attached his family, his friends, the senate, and the people of Rome. The people beheld with satisfaction the infant pupil of Christianity turning aside his head and weeping at the barbarity of the ordinary public spectacles, in which criminals were exposed to wild-beasts.* The Christian interest at the court repressed the occasional outbursts of popular animosity: many Christians of rank and distinction enjoyed the avowed favour of the Emperor. Their security may partly be attributed to their calm determination not to mingle themselves up with the contending factions for the empire. During the conflict of parties, they had refused to espouse the cause either of Niger or Albinus. Retired within themselves, they rendered their prompt and cheerful obedience to the ruling Emperor. The implacable vengeance which Severus wreaked on the senate, for their real or suspected inclination to the party of Albinus, his remorseless execution of so many of the noblest of the aristocracy, may have placed in a stronger light the happier fortune, and commended the unimpeachable loyalty, of the Christians. The provincial governors, as usual, reflected the example of the court; some adopted merciful expedients to avoid the necessity of carrying the laws into effect against those Christians who were denounced before their tribunals; while the more venal humanity of others extorted a considerable profit from the Christians for their security. The

Peaceful conduct of the Christians.

* Spartian. Anton. Caracalla. p. 404.

unlawful religion, in many places, purchased its peace at the price of a regular tax, which was paid by other illegal, and mostly infamous, professions. This traffic with the authorities was sternly denounced by some of the more ardent believers, as degrading to the religion, and an ignominious barter of the hopes and glories of martyrdom.* CHAP. VIII.

Such was the flourishing and peaceful state of Christianity during the early part of the reign of Severus. In the East, at a later period, he embraced a sterner policy. During the conflict with Niger, the Samaritans had espoused the losing, the Jews the successful, party. The edicts of Severus were, on the whole, favourable to the Jews, but the prohibition to circumcise proselytes was re-enacted during his residence in Syria, in the tenth year of his reign. The same prohibition against the admission of new proselytes was extended to the Christians. But this edict may have been intended to allay the violence of the hostile factions in Syria. Of the persecution under Severus there are few, if any, traces in the West.† It is confined to Syria, perhaps Cappadocia, to Egypt, and to Africa; and, in the latter provinces, appears as the act of hostile governors, proceeding

Persecution in the East.

A. D. 202.

Christianity not persecuted in the West.

* Sed quid non timiditas persuadebit, quasi et fugere scriptura permittat, et redimere præcipiat. * * * Nescio dolendum an erubescendum sit cum in matricibus beneficiariorum et curiosorum, inter tabernarios et lanios et fures balnearum et aleones et lenones, Christiani quoque vectigales continentur. Tertull. de fugâ, c. 13.

† Nous ne trouvons rien de considérable touchant les martyrs que la persécution de Sevère a pu faire à Rome et en Italie. Tillemont. St. Andeole, and the other martyrs in Gaul (Tillemont, p. 160.), are of more than suspicious authority.

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upon the existing laws, rather than the consequence of any recent edict of the Emperor. The Syrian Eusebius may have exaggerated local acts of oppression, of which the sad traces were recorded in his native country, into a general persecution: he admits that Alexandria was the chief scene of Christian suffering. The date and the scene of the persecution may lend a clue to its origin. From Syria, the Emperor, exactly at this time, proceeded to Egypt. He surveyed, with wondering interest, the monuments of Egyptian glory and of Egyptian superstition*, the temples of Memphis, the Pyramids, the Labyrinth, the Memnonium. The plague alone prevented him from continuing his excursions into Ethiopia. The dark and relentless mind of Severus appears to have been strongly impressed with the religion of Serapis. In either character, as the great Pantheistic deity, which absorbed the attributes and functions of all the more ancient gods of Egypt, or in his more limited character, as the Pluto of their mythology, the lord of the realm of departed spirits, Serapis† was likely to captivate the imagination of Severus, and to suit those gloomier moods in which it delighted in brooding over the secrets of futurity; and, having realised the proud prognostics of greatness, which his youth had watched with hope, now began to dwell on the darker omens of decline and dissolution.‡ The

Probable causes.

Egypt.

* Spartian. Hist. Aug. p. 553.

† Compare de Guigniaut, Serapis et son Origine.

‡ Spartian had the advantage of consulting the autobiography of the Emperor Severus. Had time but spared us the original, and taken the whole Augustan history in exchange!

hour of imperial favour was likely to be seized by the Egyptian priesthood to obtain the mastery, and to wreak their revenge on this new foreign religion, which was making such rapid progress throughout the province, and the whole of Africa. Whether or not the Emperor actually authorised the persecution, his countenance would strengthen the Pagan interest, and encourage the obsequious Præfect* in adopting violent measures. Lætus would be vindicating the religion of the Emperor in asserting the superiority of Serapis; and the superiority of Serapis could be by no means so effectually asserted, as by the oppression of his most powerful adversaries. Alexandria was the ripe and pregnant soil of religious feud and deadly animosity. The hostile parties which divided the city — the Jews, the Pagans, and the Christians — though perpetually blending and modifying each other's doctrines, and forming schools in which Judaism allegorised itself into Platonism, Platonism having assimilated itself to the higher Egyptian mythology, soared into Christianity, and a Platonic Christianity, from a religion, became a mystic philosophy — awaited, nevertheless, the signal for persecution, and for license to draw off in sanguinary factions, and to settle the controversies of the schools by bloody tumults in the streets.† The perpetual syncretism of opinions

* His name was Lætus. Euseb. Eccl. Hist. vi. 2.

† Leonidas, the father of Origen, perished in this persecution. Origen was only kept away from joining him in his imprisonment, and if possible, in his martyrdom, by the prudent stratagem of his mother, who concealed all his clothes. The boy of seventeen sent a letter to his father, entreating him not to allow his parental

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instead of leading to peace and charity, seemed to inflame the deadly animosity; and the philosophical spirit which attempted to blend all the higher doctrines into a lofty Eclectic system, had no effect in harmonising the minds of the different sects to mutual toleration and amity. It was now the triumph of Paganism. The controversy with Christianity was carried on by burning their priests and torturing their virgins, until the catechetical or elementary schools of learning, by which the Alexandrian Christians trained up their pupils for the reception of their more mysterious doctrines, were deserted, the young Origen alone laboured, with indefatigable and successful activity, to supply the void caused by the general desertion of the persecuted teachers.*

Africa.

The African Præfect followed the example of Lætus in Egypt. In no part of the Roman empire had Christianity taken more deep and permanent root than in the province of Africa, then crowded with rich and populous cities, and forming, with Egypt, the granary of the Western world; but which many centuries of Christian feud, Vandal invasion, and Mahometan barbarism, have blasted to a thinly-peopled desert. Up to this period, this secluded region had gone on advancing in its uninterrupted course of civilisation. Since the battle of Munda, the African province had stood aloof from the tumults and desolation which attended the changes in the imperial dynasty.

affection for himself and his six brothers to stand in his way of obtaining the martyr's crown. Euseb. vi. 2. The property of Leonidas was confiscated to the imperial treasury. Ibid.

* Euseb. Eccles. Hist. vi. 2.

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As yet it had raised no competitor for the empire, though Severus, the ruling monarch, was of African descent. The single legion, which was considered adequate to protect its remote tranquillity from the occasional incursions of the Moorish tribes, had been found sufficient for its purpose. The Paganism of the African cities was probably weaker than in other parts of the empire. It had no ancient and sacred associations with national pride. The new cities had raised new temples, to gods foreign to the region. The religion of Carthage *, if it had not entirely perished with the final destruction of the city, maintained but a feeble hold upon the Italianised inhabitants. The Carthage of the empire was a Roman city. If Christianity tended to mitigate the fierce spirit of the inhabitants of these burning regions, it acquired itself a depth and empassioned vehemence, which perpetually broke through all restraints of moderation, charity, and peace. From Tertullian to Augustine, the climate seems to be working into the language, into the essence of Christianity. Here disputes madden into feuds; and feuds, which, in other countries, were allayed by time, or died away of themselves, grew into obstinate, implacable, and irreconcileable factions.

African Christianity.

African Christianity had no communion with the dreamy and speculative genius of the East. It sternly rejected the wild and poetic imper-

* Compare Munter, Relig. der Carthager. The worship of the Dea cœlestis, the Queen of Heaven, should perhaps be excepted. See, forward, the reign of Elagabalus. Even in the fifth century the Queen of Heaven, according to Salvian (de Gubernatione Dei, lib. viii.), shared the worship of Carthage with Christ.

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sonations, the daring cosmogonies, of the Gnostic sects: it was severe, simple, practical, in its creed; it governed by its strong and imperious hold upon the feelings, by profound and agitating emotion. It eagerly received the rigid asceticism of the anti-materialist system, while it disdained the fantastic theories by which it accounted for the origin of evil. The imagination had another office than that of following out its own fanciful creations; it spoke directly to the fears and to the passions; it delighted in realising the terrors of the final judgment; in arraying, in the most appalling language, the gloomy mysteries of future retribution. This character appears in the dark splendour of Tertullian's writings; engages him in contemptuous and relentless warfare against the Gnostic opinions, and their latest and most dangerous champion, Marcion; till, at length, it hardens into the severe, yet simpler, enthusiasm of Montanism. It appears allied with the stern assertion of ecclesiastical order and sacerdotal domination, in the earnest and zealous Cyprian; it is still manifestly working, though in a chastened and loftier form, in the deep and impassioned, but comprehensive, mind of Augustine.

Tertullian alone belongs to the present period, and Tertullian is, perhaps, the representative and the perfect type of this Africanism. It is among the most remarkable illustrations of the secret unity which connected the whole Christian world, that opinions first propagated on the shores of the Euxine found their most vigorous antagonist on the coast of Africa, while a new and fervid enthusiasm, which arose in

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Montanism.

Phrygia, captivated the kindred spirit of Tertullian. Montanism harmonised with African Christianity in the simplicity of its creed, which did not depart from the predominant form of Christianity; in the extreme rigour of its fasts (for while Gnosticism outbid the religion of Jesus and his Apostles, Montanism outbid the Gnostics in its austerities *; it admitted marriage as a necessary evil, but it denounced second nuptials as an inexpiable sin †); above all, in its resolving religion into inward emotion. There is a singular correspondence between Phrygian Heathenism and the Phrygian Christianity of Montanus and his followers. The Orgiasm, the inward rapture, the working of a divine influence upon the soul, till it was wrought up to a state of holy frenzy, had continually sent forth the priests of Cybele, and females of a highly excitable temperament, into the Western provinces ‡; whom the vulgar beheld

* The Western churches were, as yet, generally averse to the excessive fasting subsequently introduced to so great an extent, by the monastic spirit. See the curious vision of Attalus, the martyr of Lyons, in which a fellow-prisoner, Alcibiades, who had long lived on bread and water alone, was reproved for not making free use of God's creatures; and thus giving offence to the church. The churches of Lyons and Vienne having been founded from Phrygia, were anxious to avoid the least imputation of Montanism. Euseb. Eccl. Hist. v. 3.

† The prophetesses abandoned their husbands, according to Apollonius apud Euseb. v. 18.

‡ The effect of national character and temperament on the opinions and form of religion did not escape the observation of the Christian writers. There is a curious passage on the Phrygian national character in Socrates, H. E. iv. 28.—"The Phrygians are a chaste and temperate people; they seldom swear: the Scythians and Thracians are choleric; the Eastern nations more disposed to immorality; the Paphlagonians and Phrygians to neither: they do not care for the theatre or the games; prostitution is unusual." Their suppressed passions seem to have broken out at all periods in religious emotions.

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with awe, as manifestly possessed by the divinity; whom the philosophic party, equally mistaken, treated with contempt, as imposters. So, with the followers of Montanus (and women were his most ardent votaries), with Prisca and Maximilla, the apostles of his sect, the pure, and meek, and peaceful spirit of Christianity became a wild, a visionary, a frantic enthusiasm: it worked paroxysms of intense devotion; it made the soul partake of all the fever of physical excitement. As in all ages, where the mild and rational faith of Christ has been too calm and serene for persons brooding to madness over their own internal emotions, it proclaimed itself a religious advancement, a more sublime and spiritual Christianity. Judaism was the infancy, Christianity the youth, the revelation of the Spirit the manhood of the human soul. It was this Spirit, this Paraclete, which resided in all its fulness in the bosom of Montanus; his adversaries asserted that he gave himself out as the Paraclete; but it is more probable that his vague and mystic language was misunderstood, or, possibly misrepresented, by the malice of his adversaries. In Montanism the sectarian, the exclusive spirit, was at its height; and this claim to higher perfection, this seclusion from the vulgar race of Christians, whose weakness had been too often shown in the hour of trial; who had neither attained the height of his austerity, nor courted martyrdom, nor refused all ignominious compromises with the persecuting authorities with the unbending rigour which he demanded, would still

further commend the claims of Montanism to the homage of Tertullian.

During this persecution, Tertullian stood forth as the apologist of Christianity; and the tone of his apology is characteristic not only of the individual, but of his native country, while it is no less illustrative of the altered position of Christianity. The address of Tertullian to Scapula, the Præfect of Africa, is no longer in the tone of tranquil expostulation against the barbarity of persecuting blameless and unoffending men, still less that of humble supplication. Every sentence breathes scorn, defiance, menace. It heaps contempt upon the gods of Paganism; it avows the determination of the Christians to expel the *dæmons* from the respect and adoration of mankind. It condescends not to exculpate the Christians from being the cause of the calamities which had recently laid waste the province; the torrent rains which had swept away the harvests; the fires which had heaped with ruin the streets of Carthage; the sun which had been preternaturally eclipsed, when at its meridian, during an assembly of the province at Utica. All these portentous signs are unequivocally ascribed to the vengeance of the Christian's God, visiting the guilt of obstinate idolatry. The persecutors of the Christians are warned by the awful examples of Roman dignitaries who had been stricken blind, and eaten with worms, as the chastisement of Heaven for their injustice and cruelty to the worshippers of Christ. Scapula himself is sternly admonished to take warning by their fate; while the

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orator, by no means deficient, at the same time, in dexterous address, reminds him of the humane policy of others: — "Your cruelty will be our glory. Thousands of both sexes, and of every rank, will eagerly crowd to martyrdom, exhaust your fires, and weary your swords. Carthage must be decimated; the principal persons in the city, even, perhaps, your own most intimate friends and kindred, must be sacrificed. Vainly will you war against God. Magistrates are but men, and will suffer the common lot of mortality; but Christianity will endure as long as the Roman empire, and the duration of the empire will be coeval with that of the world."

History, even Christian history, is confined to more general views of public affairs, and dwells too exclusively on what may be called the high places of human life; but whenever a glimpse is afforded of lowlier, and of more common life, it is, perhaps, best fulfilling its office of presenting a lively picture of the times, if it allows itself occasionally some more minute detail, and illustrates the manner in which the leading events of particular periods affected individuals not in the highest station.

Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas.

Of all the histories of martyrdom, none is so unexaggerated in its tone and language, so entirely unincumbered with miracle; none abounds in such exquisite touches of nature, or, on the whole, from its minuteness and circumstantiality, breathes such an air of truth and reality, as that of Perpetua and Felicitas, two African females. Their death is ascribed, in the Acts, to the year

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A. D. 202.

of the accession of Geta*, the son of Severus. Though there was no general persecution at that period, yet, as the Christians held their lives, at all times, liable to the outburst of popular resentment, or the caprice of an arbitrary proconsul, there is much probability that a time of general rejoicing might be that in which the Christians, who were always accused of a disloyal reluctance to mingle in the popular festivities, and who kept aloof from the public sacrifices on such anniversaries, would be most exposed to persecution. The youthful catechumens, Revocatus and Felicitas, Saturninus and Secundulus, were apprehended, and with them Vivia Perpetua, a woman of good family, liberal education, and honourably married. Perpetua was about twenty-two years old; her father and mother were living; she had two brothers, — one of them, like herself, a catechumen, — and an infant at her breast. The history of the martyrdom is related by Perpetua herself, and is said to have been written by her own hand: — "When

* The external evidence to the authenticity of these Acts is not quite equal to the internal. They were first published by Lucas Holstenius, from a MS. in the convent of Monte Casino; re-edited by Valesius at Paris, and by Ruinart, in his Acta Sincera Martyrum, p. 90., who collated two other MSS. There appear, however, strong indications that the Acts of these African Martyrs are translated from the Greek; at least it is difficult otherwise to account for the frequent untranslated Greek words and idioms in the text. The following are examples: C. iii. turbarum beneficio, χαρὶν· c. iv. bene venisti, tegnon, τεκνόν· viii. in oramate, a vision, ὁράματι· diadema, or diastema, an interval, διαστῆμα· c. x. afe, ἀφὴ· xii. agios, agios, agios.

There are indeed some suspicious marks of Montanism which perhaps prevented these Acts from being more generally known.

It is not quite clear where these martyrs suffered. Valesius supposed Carthage, others, in that one of the two towns called Tuburbium which was situated in proconsular Africa.

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we were in the hands of the persecutors, my father, in his tender affection, persevered in his endeavours to pervert me from the faith.* 'My father, this vessel, be it a pitcher, or any thing else, can we call it by any other name?' 'Certainly not,' he replied. 'Nor can I call myself by any name but that of Christian?' My father looked as if he could have plucked my eyes out; but he only harassed me, and departed, persuaded by the arguments of the devil. Then, after being a few days without seeing my father, I was enabled to give thanks to God, and his absence was tempered to my spirit. After a few days we were baptized, and the waters of baptism seemed to give power of endurance to my body. Again a few days, and we were cast into prison. I was terrified; for I had never before seen such total darkness. O miserable day! —from the dreadful heat of the prisoners crowded together, and the insults of the soldiers. But I was wrung with solicitude for my infant. Two of our deacons, however, by the payment of money, obtained our removal for some hours in the day to a more open part of the prison. Each of the captives then pursued his usual occupation; but I sate and suckled my infant, who was wasting away with hunger. In my anxiety, I addressed and consoled my mother, and commended my child to my brother; and I began to pine away at seeing them pining away on my account. And for many days I suffered this anxiety, and accustomed my child to remain in the prison with me;

* Dejicere, to cast me down, is the expressive phrase, not uncommon among the early Christians.

and I immediately recovered my strength, and was relieved from my toil and trouble for my infant, and the prison became to me like a palace; and I was happier there than I should have been any where else.

"My brother then said to me, 'Perpetua, you are exalted to such dignity, that you may pray for a vision, and it shall be shown you whether our doom is martyrdom or release.'" This is the language of Montanism; but the vision is exactly that which might haunt the slumbers of the Christian in a high state of religious enthusiasm; it showed merely the familiar images of the faith, arranging themselves into form. She saw a lofty ladder of gold, ascending to heaven; around it were swords, lances, hooks; and a great dragon lay at its foot, to seize those who would ascend. Saturus, a distinguished Christian, went up first; beckoned her to follow; and controlled the dragon by the name of Jesus Christ. She ascended, and found herself in a spacious garden, in which sate a man with white hair, in the garb of a shepherd, milking his sheep*, with many myriads around him. He welcomed her, and gave her a morsel of cheese; and "I received it with folded hands, and ate it; and all the saints around exclaimed, 'amen.' I awoke at the sound, with the sweet taste in my mouth, and I related it to my brother; and we knew that our martyrdom was at hand, and we began to have no hope in this world."

"After a few days, there was a rumour that we were to be heard. And my father came from the

* Bishop Munter, in his Sinnbilder der alten Christen, refers to this passage, to illustrate one of the oldest bas reliefs of Christian art. H. i. p. 62.

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city, wasted away with anxiety, to pervert me; and he said, 'Have compassion, O my daughter! on my grey hairs; have compassion on thy father, if he is worthy of the name of father. If I have thus brought thee up to the flower of thine age; if I have preferred thee to all thy brothers, do not expose me to this disgrace. Look on thy brother; look on thy mother, and thy aunt; look on thy child, who cannot live without thee. Do not destroy us all.' Thus spake my father, kissing my hands in his fondness, and throwing himself at my feet; and in his tears he called me not his daughter, but his mistress (domina). And I was grieved for the grey hairs of my father, because he alone, of all our family, did not rejoice in my martyrdom: and I consoled him, saying, 'In this trial, what God wills, will take place. Know that we are not in our own power, but in that of God.' And he went away sorrowing.

"Another day, while we were at dinner, we were suddenly seized and carried off to trial; and we came to the town. The report spread rapidly, and an immense multitude was assembled. We were placed at the bar; the rest were interrogated, and made their confession. And it came to my turn; and my father instantly appeared with my child, and he drew me down the step, and said in a beseeching tone; 'Have compassion on your infant;' and Hilarianus the procurator, who exercised the power of life and death for the Proconsul Timinianus, who had died, said, 'Spare the grey hairs of your parent; spare your infant; offer sacrifice for the welfare of the Emperor.' And I answered, 'I

will not sacrifice.' 'Art thou a Christian?' said Hilarianus; I answered, 'I am a Christian.' And while my father stood there to persuade me, Hilarianus ordered him to be thrust down, and beaten with rods. And the misfortune of my father grieved me; and I was as much grieved for his old age as if I had been scourged myself. He then passed sentence on us all, and condemned us to the wild-beasts; and we went back in cheerfulness to the prison. And because I was accustomed to suckle my infant, and to keep it with me in the prison, I sent Pomponius the deacon to seek it from my father. But my father would not send it; but, by the will of God, the child no longer desired the breast, and I suffered no uneasiness; lest at such a time I should be afflicted by the sufferings of my child, or by pains in my breasts."

Her visions now grow more frequent and vivid. The name of her brother Dinocrates suddenly occurred to her in her prayers. He had died at seven years old, of a loathsome disease, no doubt without Christian baptism. She had a vision in which Dinocrates appeared in a place of profound darkness, where there was a pool of water, which he could not reach on account of his small stature. In a second vision, Dinocrates appeared again; the pool rose up and touched him, and he drank a full goblet of the water. "And when he was satisfied, he went away to play, as infants are wont, and I awoke; and I knew that he was translated from the place of punishment."*

* This is evidently a kind of purgatory.

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Again a few days, and the keeper of the prison, profoundly impressed by their conduct, and beginning to discern "the power of God within them," admitted many of the brethren to visit them, for mutual consolation. "And as the day of the games approached, my father entered, worn out with affliction, and began to pluck his beard, and to throw himself down with his face upon the ground, and to wish that he could hasten his death; and to speak words which might have moved any living creature. And I was grieved for the sorrows of his old age." The night before they were to be exposed in the arena, she dreamed that she was changed to a man; fought and triumphed over a huge and terrible Egyptian gladiator; and she put her foot upon his head, and she received the crown, and passed out of the Vivarian gate, and knew that she had triumphed not over man but over the devil. The vision of Saturus, which he related for their consolation, was more splendid. He ascended into the realms of light, into a beautiful garden, and to a palace, the walls of which were light; and there he was welcomed, not only by the angels, but by all the friends who had preceded him in the glorious career. It is singular that, among the rest, he saw a bishop and a priest, among whom there had been some dissension. And while Perpetua was conversing with them, the angels interfered and insisted on their perfect reconciliation. Some kind of blame seems to be attached to the Bishop Optatus, because some of his flock appeared as if they came from the factions of

the circus, with the spirit of mortal strife not yet allayed. CHAP. VIII.

The narrative then proceeds to another instance of the triumph of faith over the strongest of human feelings, the love of a young mother for her offspring. Felicitas was in the eighth month of her pregnancy. She feared, and her friends shared in her apprehension, that, on that account, her martyrdom might be delayed. They prayed together, and her travail came on. In her agony at that most painful period of delivery, she gave way to her sufferings. "How then," said one of the servants of the prison, "if you cannot endure these pains, will you endure exposure to the wild-beasts?" She replied, "I bear now my own sufferings; then, there will be one within me who will bear my sufferings for me, because I shall suffer for his sake." She brought forth a girl, of whom a Christian sister took the charge.

Perpetua maintained her calmness to the end. While they were treated with severity by a tribune, who feared lest they should be delivered from the prison by enchantment, Perpetua remonstrated with a kind of mournful pleasantry, and said that, if ill-used, they would do no credit to the birthday of Cæsar: the victims ought to be fattened for the sacrifice. But their language and demeanour was not always so calm and gentle; the words of some became those of defiance — almost of insult; and this is related with as much admiration as the more tranquil sublimity of the former incidents. To the people who gazed on them, in their importunate curio-

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sity, at their agape, they said, "Is not to-morrow's spectacle enough to satiate your hate? To-day you look on us with friendly faces, to-morrow you will be our deadly enemies. Mark well our countenances, that you may know them again on the day of judgment." And to Hilarianus, on his tribunal, they said, "Thou judgest us, but God will judge thee." At this language, the exasperated people demanded that they should be scourged. When taken out to execution they declined, and were permitted to decline, the profane dress in which they were to be clad; the men, that of the priests of Saturn; the women, that of the priestesses of Ceres.* They came forward in their simple attire, Perpetua singing psalms. The men were exposed to leopards and bears; the women were hung up naked in nets, to be gored by a furious cow. But even the excited populace shrunk with horror at the spectacle of two young and delicate women, one recently recovered from childbirth, in this state. They were recalled by acclamation, and in mercy brought forward again, clad in loose robes.† Perpetua was tossed, her garment was rent; but, more conscious of her wounded modesty than of pain, she drew the robe over the part of her person which was exposed. She then calmly clasped up her hair, because it did not become a martyr to suffer with dishevelled locks, the sign of sorrow. She then raised up her fainting and mor-

* This was an unusual circumstance; and ascribed to the devil.

† I am not sure that I am correct in this part of the version; it appears to me to be the sense. "Ita revocatæ discinguntur" is paraphrased by Lucas Holstenius, revocatæ et discinctis indutæ.

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tally wounded Felicitas, and the cruelty of the populace being for a time appeased, they were permitted to retire. Perpetua seemed wrapt in ecstacy, and as if awaking from sleep, inquired when she was to be exposed to the beast. She could scarcely be made to believe what had taken place; her last words tenderly admonished her brother to be stedfast in the faith. We may close the scene by intimating that all were speedily released from their sufferings, and entered into their glory. Perpetua guided with her own hand the merciful sword of the gladiator which relieved her from her agony.

Caracalla. Geta. A. D. 211 —217.

This African persecution, which laid the seeds of future schisms and fatal feuds, lasted till, at least, the second year of Caracalla. From its close, except during the short reign of Maximin, Christianity enjoyed uninterrupted peace till the reign of Decius.* But, during this period occurred a remarkable event in the religious history of Rome. The pontiff of one of the wild forms of the Nature-worship of the East appeared in the city of Rome as Emperor; the ancient rites of Baalpeor, but little changed in the course of ages, intruded themselves into the sanctuary of the Capitoline Jove, and offended at once the religious majesty and the graver decency of Roman manners.† Elagabalus derived his name from the Syrian appellative of the sun; he had been educated in the precincts of the temple; and the Emperor of Rome

Elagabalus emperor. A. D. 218.

* From 212 to 249.:—Caracalla, 211; Macrinus, 217; Elagabalus, 218; Alexander Severus, 222; Maximin and the Gordians, 235—244; Philip, 244; Decius, 249.

† Lampridii Heliogabalus. Dion Cassius, l. lxxix. Herodian. v.

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was lost and absorbed in the priest of an effeminate superstition. The new religion did not steal in under the modest demeanour of a stranger, claiming the common rites of hospitality, as the national faith of a subject people: it entered with a public pomp, as though to supersede and eclipse the ancestral deities of Rome. The god Elagabalus was conveyed in solemn procession through the wondering provinces; his symbols were received with all the honour of the Supreme Deity. The conical black stone, which was adored at Emesa, was, no doubt, in its origin, one of those obscene symbols which appear in almost every form of the Oriental nature-worship. The rudeness of ancient art had allowed it to remain in less offensive shapelessness; and, not improbably, the original symbolic meaning had become obsolete. The Sun had become the visible type of Deity, and the object of adoration. The mysterious principle of generation, of which, in the primitive religion of nature, he was the type and image, gave place to the noblest object of human idolatry — the least debasing representative of the Great Supreme. The idol of Emesa entered Rome in solemn procession; a magnificent temple was built upon the Palatine Hill; a number of altars stood round, on which every day the most sumptuous offerings — hecatombs of oxen, countless sheep, the most costly aromatics, the choicest wines were offered; streams of blood and wine were constantly flowing down; while the highest dignitaries of the empire — commanders of legions, rulers of provinces, the gravest

senators, appeared as humble ministers, clad in the loose and flowing robes and linen sandals of the East, among the lascivious dances and the wanton music of Oriental drums and cymbals. These degrading practices were the only way to civil and military preferment. The whole senate and equestrian order stood around; and those who played ill the part of adoration, or whose secret murmurs incautiously betrayed their devout indignation (for this insult to the ancient religion of Rome awakened some sense of shame in the degenerate and servile aristocracy), were put to death. The most sacred and patriotic sentiments cherished above all the hallowed treasures of the city, the Palladium, the image of Minerva. Popular veneration worshipped, in distant awe, the unseen deity; for profane eye might never behold the virgin image. The inviolability of the Roman dominion was inseparably connected with the uncontaminated sanctity of the Palladium. The Syrian declared his intention of wedding the ancient tutelary goddess to his foreign deity. The image was publicly brought forth; exposed to the sullying gaze of the multitude; solemnly wedded, and insolently repudiated by the unworthy stranger. A more appropriate bride was found in the kindred Syrian deity, worshipped under the name of Astarte in the East, in Carthage, as the Queen of Heaven—Venus Urania, as translated into the mythological language of the West. She was brought from Carthage. The whole city—the whole of Italy—was commanded to celebrate the bridal festival; and the nuptials of the two foreign deities might appear to complete the

Worship of the sun in Rome.

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triumph over the insulted divinities of Rome. Nothing was sacred to the voluptuous Syrian. He introduced the manners as well as the religion of the East; his rapid succession of wives imitated the polygamy of an Oriental despot; and his vices not merely corrupted the morals, but insulted the most sacred feelings, of the people. He tore a vestal virgin from her sanctuary, to suffer his polluting embraces; he violated the sanctuary itself; attempted to make himself master of the mystic coffer in which the sacred deposit was enshrined: it was said that the pious fraud of the priesthood deceived him with a counterfeit, which he dashed to pieces in his anger. It was openly asserted, that the worship of the sun, under his name of Elagabalus, was to supersede all other worship. If we may believe the biographies in the Augustan history, a more ambitious scheme of a universal religion had dawned upon the mind of the Emperor; and that the Jewish, the Samaritan, even the Christian, were to be fused and recast into one great system, of which the sun was to be the central object of adoration.* At all events, the deities of Rome were actually degraded before the public gaze into humble ministers of Elagabalus. Every year of the Emperor's brief reign, the god was conveyed from his Palatine temple to a suburban edifice of still more sumptuous magnificence. The statue passed in a car drawn by six horses. The Emperor of the

Religious innovations meditated by Elagabalus.

* Id agens ne quis Romæ Deus nisi Heliogabulus coleretur. Dicebat præterea, Judæorum et Samaritanorum religiones, et Christianam devotionem, illuc transferendam, ut omnium culturarum secretum Heliogabali sacerdotium teneret. p. 461.

world, his eyes stained with paint, ran and danced before it with antic gestures of adoration. The earth was strewn with gold dust; flowers and chaplets were scattered by the people, while the images of all the other gods, the splendid ornaments and vessels of all their temples, were carried, like the spoils of subject nations, in the annual ovation of the Phœnician deity. Even human sacrifices, and if we may credit the monstrous fact, the most beautiful sons of the noblest families, were offered on the altar of this Moloch of the East.*

It is impossible to suppose that the weak and crumbling edifice of Paganism was not shaken to its base by this extraordinary revolution. An ancient religion cannot thus be insulted without losing much of its majesty: its hold upon the popular veneration is violently torn asunder. With its more sincere votaries, the general animosity to foreign, particularly to Eastern, religions, might be enflamed or deepened; and Christianity might share in some part of the detestation excited by the excesses of a superstition so opposite in its nature. But others whose faith had been shaken, and whose moral feelings revolted, by a religion whose essential character was sensuality, and whose licentious tendency had been so disgustingly illustrated by the unspeakable pollutions of its imperial patron, would hasten to embrace that purer faith which was most remote from the religion of Elagabalus.

* Cædit et humanas hostias, et matrimis, credo ut major esset lectis ad hoc pueris nobilibus et utrique parenti dolor. Lamprid. decoris per omnem Italiam patrimis Heliogabalus.

BOOK II.

Alexander Severus, Emperor. A. D. 222.

From the policy of the court, as well as the pure and amiable character of the successor of Elagabalus, the more offensive parts of this foreign superstition disappeared with their imperial patron. But the old Roman religion was not reinstated in its jealous and unmingled dignity. Alexander Severus had been bred in another school; and the influence which swayed him, during the earlier part at least of his reign, was of a different character from that which had formed the mind of Elagabalus. It was the mother of Elagabalus who, however she might blush with shame at the impurities of her effeminate son, had consecrated him to the service of the deity in Emesa. The mother of Alexander Severus, the able, perhaps crafty and rapacious, Mammæa, had at least held intercourse with the Christians of Syria. She had conversed with the celebrated Origen, and listened to his exhortations, if without conversion, still not without respect. Alexander, though he had neither the religious education, the pontifical character, nor the dissolute manners, of his predecessor, was a Syrian, with no hereditary attachment to the Roman form of Paganism. He seems to have affected a kind of universalism: he paid decent respect to the gods of the Capitol; he held in honour the Egyptian worship, and enlarged the temples of Isis and Serapis. In his own palace, with respectful indifference, he enshrined, as it were, as his household deities, the representatives of the different religious or theophilosophic systems which were prevalent in the Roman empire,—Orpheus, Abraham, Christ, and Apollonius of Tyana. The first of

Mammæa.

these represented the wisdom of the mysteries, the purified nature-worship, which had laboured to elevate the popular mythology into a noble and coherent allegorism. It is singular that Abraham, rather than Moses, was placed at the head of Judaism: it is possible that the traditionary sanctity which attached to the first parent of the Jewish people, and of many of the Arab tribes, and which was afterwards embodied in the Mahometan Koran, was floating in the East, and would comprehend, as it were, the opinions not only of the Jews, but of a much wider circle of the Syrian natives. In Apollonius, was centered the more modern Theurgy, the magic which commanded the intermediate spirits between the higher world and the world of man; the more spiritual polytheism which had released the subordinate deities from their human form, and maintained them in a constant intercourse with the soul of man. Christianity, in the person of its founder, even where it did not command authority as a religion, had nevertheless lost the character under which it had so long and so unjustly laboured, of animosity to mankind. Though he was considered but as one of the sages who shared in the homage paid to their beneficent wisdom, the followers of Jesus had now lived down all the bitter hostility which had so generally prevailed against them. The homage of Alexander Severus may be a fair test of the general sentiment of the more intelligent Heathen of his time.*

* Jablonski wrote a very ingenious essay to show that Alexander Severus was converted to *Gnostic* Christianity. Opuscula, vol. iv. Compare Heyne, Opuscula, vi. p. 169, et seqq.

BOOK II.

It is clear that the exclusive spirit of Greek and Roman civilisation is broken down: it is not now Socrates or Plato, Epicurus or Zeno, who are considered the sole guiding intellects of human wisdom. These Eastern *barbarians* are considered rivals, if not superior, to the philosophers of Greece. The world is betraying its irresistible yearning towards a *religion;* and these were the first overtures, as it were, to more general submission.

Change in the relation of Christianity to society.

In the reign of Alexander Severus, at least commenced the great change in the outward appearance of Christianity. Christian bishops were admitted, even at the court, in a recognised official character; and Christian churches began to rise in different parts of the empire, and to possess endowments in land.* To the astonishment of the Heathen, their religion had as yet appeared without temple or altar; their religious assemblies had been held in privacy: it was yet a domestic worship. Even the Jew had his public synagogue or his more secluded proseucha; but where the Christians met was indicated by no separate and distinguished dwelling; the cemetery of their dead, the sequestered grove, the private chamber, contained their peaceful assemblies. Their privacy was at once their security and their danger. On

* Tillemont, as Gibbon observes, assigns the date of the earliest Christian churches to the reign of Alexander Severus; Mr. Moyle to that of Gallienus. The difference is very slight, and after all, the change from a private building, set apart for a particular use, and a public one of no architectural pretensions, may have been almost imperceptible. The passage of Lampridius appears conclusive in favour of Tillemont.

CHAP. VIII.

First Christian churches.

the one hand, there was no well-known edifice in which the furious and excited rabble could surprise the general body of the Christians, and wreak its vengeance by indiscriminate massacre; on the other, the jealousy of the government against all private associations would be constantly kept on the alert; and a religion without a temple was so inexplicable a problem to Pagan feeling, that it would strengthen and confirm all the vague imputations of Atheism, or of criminal license in these mysterious meetings, which seemed to shun the light of day. Their religious usages must now have become much better known, as Alexander borrowed their mode of publishing the names of those who were proposed for ordination, and established a similar proceeding with regard to all candidates for civil office; and a piece of ground, in Rome, which was litigated by a company of victuallers, was awarded by the Emperor himself to the Christians, upon the principle that it was better that it should be devoted to the worship of God in any form, than applied to a profane and unworthy use.*

These buildings were no doubt, as yet, of modest height and unpretending form; but the religion was thus publicly recognised as one of the various forms of worship which the government did not prohibit from opening the gates of its temples to mankind.

The progress of Christianity during all this period, though silent, was uninterrupted. The mi-

* Ælii Lampridii Alexander Severus.

BOOK II.

series which were gradually involving the whole Roman empire, from the conflicts and the tyranny of a rapid succession of masters; from taxation gradually becoming more grinding and burdensome; and the still multiplying inroads and expanding devastations of the barbarians, assisted its progress. Many took refuge in a religion which promised beatitude in a future state of being, from the inevitable evils of this life.

Influence of Christianity on Heathenism.

But in no respect is its progress more evident and remarkable than in the influence of Christianity on Heathenism itself. Though philosophy, which had long been the antagonist and most dangerous enemy of the popular religion, now made apparently common cause with it against the common enemy, Christianity; yet there had been an unperceived and amicable approximation between the two religions. Heathenism, as interpreted by philosophy, almost found favour with some of the more moderate Christian apologists; while, as we have seen, in the altered tone of the controversy, the Christians have rarely occasion to defend themselves against those horrible charges of licentiousness, incest, and cannibalism, which, till recently, their advocates had been constrained to notice. The Christians endeavoured to enlist the earlier philosophers in their cause; they were scarcely content with asserting that the nobler Grecian philosophy might be designed to prepare the human mind for the reception of Christianity; they were almost inclined to endow these sages with a kind of prophetic foreknowledge of its more mysterious

doctrines. "I have explained," says the Christian in Minucius Felix, "the opinions of almost all the philosophers, whose most illustrious glory it is that they have worshipped one God, though under various names; so that one might suppose, either that the Christians of the present day are philosophers, or that the philosophers of old were already Christians." *

But these advances on the part of Christianity were more than met by Paganism. The Heathen religion, which prevailed at least among the more enlightened Pagans during this period, and which, differently modified, more fully developed, and, as we shall hereafter find, exalted still more from a philosophy into a religion, Julian endeavoured to reinstate as the established faith, was almost as different from that of the older Greeks and Romans, or even that which prevailed at the commencement of the empire, as it was from Christianity. It worshipped in the same temples; it performed, to a certain extent, the same rites; it actually abrogated the local worship of no one of the multitudinous deities of Paganism. But over all this, which was the real religion, both in theory and practice, in the older times, had risen a kind of speculative Theism, to which the popular worship acknowledged its humble subordination. On the great elementary principle of Christianity, the unity of the Supreme God, this approximation had long been silently made. Celsus, in his celebrated controversy with

Change in Heathenism.

* I am here again considerably indebted to Tschirner, Fall des Heidenthums, p. 334—401.

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Origen, asserts that this philosophical notion of the Deity is perfectly reconcileable with Paganism. "We also can place a Supreme Being above the world, and above all human things, and approve and sympathise in whatever may be taught of a spiritual rather than material adoration of the gods; for, with the belief in the gods, worshipped in every land and by every people, harmonises the belief in a Primal Being, a Supreme God, who has given to every land its guardian, to every people its presiding deity. The unity of the Supreme Being, and the consequent unity of the design of the universe, remains, even if it be admitted that each people has its gods, whom it must worship in a peculiar manner, according to their peculiar character; and the worship of all these different deities is reflected back to the Supreme God, who has appointed them, as it were, his delegates and representatives. Those who argue that men ought not to serve many masters impute human weakness to God. God is not jealous of the adoration paid to subordinate deities; he is superior in his nature to degradation and insult. Reason itself might justify the belief in the inferior deities, which are the objects of the established worship. For since the Supreme God can only produce that which is immortal and imperishable, the existence of mortal beings cannot be explained, unless we distinguish from him those inferior deities, and assert them to be the creators of mortal beings and of perishable things."*

* Origen contra Celsum, lib. vii.

CHAP. VIII.

From this time, Paganism has changed not merely some of its fundamental tenets, but its general character; it has become serious, solemn, devout. In Lucian, unbelief seemed to have reached its height, and as rapidly declined. The witty satirist of Polytheism had, no doubt, many admirers; he had no imitators. A reaction has taken place; none of the distinguished statesmen of the third century boldly and ostentatiously, as in the times of the later republic, display their contempt for religion. Epicureanism lost, if not its partisans, its open advocates. The most eminent writers treat religion with decency, if not with devout respect; no one is ambitious of passing for a despiser of the gods. And with faith and piety broke forth all the aberrations of religious belief and devout feeling, wonder-working mysticism, and dreamy enthusiasm, in their various forms.*

Paganism becomes serious.

This was the commencement of that new Platonism which, from this time, exercised a supreme authority, to the extinction of the older forms of Grecian philosophy, and grew up into a dangerous antagonist of Christianity. It aspired to be a religion as well as a philosophy, and gradually incorporated more and more of such religious elements from the creeds of the Oriental philosophers as would harmonise with its system. It was extravagant, but it was earnest; wild, but serious. It created a kind of literature of its own. The Life of Apollonius of Tyana was a grave romance, in which it embodied much of its Theurgy, its power of connecting the

Apollonius of Tyana.

* Tschirner, p. 401.

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invisible with the visible world; its wonder-working, through the intermediate dæmons at its command, which bears possibly, but not clearly, an intentional, certainly a close, resemblance to the Gospels. It seized and moulded to its purpose the poetry and philosophy of older Greece. Such of the mythic legends as it could allegorise, it retained with every demonstration of reverence; the rest it either allowed quietly to fall into oblivion, or repudiated as lawless fictions of the poets. The manner in which poetry was transmuted into moral and religious allegory is shown in the treatise of Porphyrius on the cave of the nymphs in the Odyssey. The skill, as well as the dreamy mysticism, with which this school of writers combined the dim traditions of the older philosophy and the esoteric doctrines of the mysteries, to give the sanction of antiquity to their own vague but attractive and fanciful theories, appears in the Life of Pythagoras, and in the work on the Mysteries, by a somewhat later writer, Iamblichus.

Porphyrius.

Life of Pythagoras.

Philosophic Paganism not popular.

After all, however, this philosophic Paganism could exercise no very extensive influence. Its votaries were probably far inferior in number to any one of those foreign religions introduced into the Greek and Roman part of the empire; and its strength perhaps consisted in the facility with which it coalesced with any one of those religions, or blended them up together in one somewhat discordant syncretism. The same man was philosopher, Hierophant at Samothrace or Eleusis, and initiate in the rites of Cybele, of Serapis, or of

Mithra. Of itself this scheme was far too abstract and metaphysical to extend beyond the schools of Alexandria or of Athens. Though it prevailed afterwards in influencing the Heathen fanaticism of Julian, it eventually retarded but little the extinction of Heathenism. It was merely a sort of refuge for the intellectual few—a self-complacent excuse, which enabled them to assert, as they supposed, their own mental superiority, while they were endeavouring to maintain or to revive the vulgar superstition, which they themselves could not, but in secret, contemn. The more refined it became, the less was it suited for common use, and the less it harmonised with the ordinary Paganism. Thus that which, in one respect, elevated it into a dangerous rival of Christianity, at the same time deprived it of its power. It had borrowed much from Christianity, or, at least, had been tacitly modified by its influence; but it was the speculative rather than the practical part, that which constituted its sublimity rather than its popularity, in which it approximated to the Gospel. We shall encounter this new Paganism again before long, in its more perfect and developed form.

Maximin. A. D. 235.

The peace which Christianity enjoyed under the virtuous Severus was disturbed by the violent accession of a Thracian savage.* It was enough to have shared in the favour of Alexander to incur the brutal resentment of Maximin. The Christian bishops, like all the other polite and virtuous cour-

* Euseb. Ecc. Hist. vi. 28.

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tiers of his peaceful predecessor, were exposed to the suspicions and the hatred of the rude and warlike Maximin. Christianity, however, suffered, though in a severer degree, the common lot of mankind.

Gordian. A. D. 238—244.

The short reign of Gordian was uneventful in Christian history. The Emperors, it has been justly observed, who were born in the Asiatic provinces were, in general, the least unfriendly to Christianity. Their religion, whatever it might be, was less uncongenial to some of the forms of the new faith; it was a kind of Eclecticism of different Eastern religions, which, in general, was least inclined to intolerance: at any rate, it was uninfluenced by national pride, which was now become the main support of Roman Paganism. Philip, the Arabian*, is claimed by some of the earliest Christian writers, as a convert to the Gospel. But the extraordinary splendour with which he celebrated the great religious rites of Rome refutes at once this statement. Yet it might be fortunate that a sovereign of his mild sentiments towards the new faith filled the throne at a period when the secular games, which commemorated the thousandth year of Rome, were celebrated with unexampled magnificence. The majesty, the eternity, of the empire were intimately connected with the due performance of these solemnities. To their intermission, after the reign of Dioclesian, the Pagan historian ascribes the decline of Roman greatness. The second millennium of Rome commenced with no flattering signs; the

Philip. A. D. 244.

Secular games. A. D. 247.

* Euseb. vi. 34.

times were gloomy and menacing; and the general and rigid absence of the Christians from these sacred national ceremonies, under a sterner or more bigoted emperor, would scarcely have escaped the severest animadversions of the government. Even under the present circumstances, the danger of popular tumult would be with difficulty avoided or restrained. Did patriotism and national pride incline the Roman Christians to make some sacrifice of their severer principles; to compromise for a time their rigid aversion to idolatry, which was thus connected with the peace and prosperity of the state? CHAP. VIII.

The persecution under Decius, both in extent and violence, is the most uncontested of those which the ecclesiastical historians took pains to raise to the mystic number of the ten plagues of Egypt. It was almost the first measure of a reign which commenced in successful rebellion, and ended, after two years, in fatal defeat. The Goths delivered the Christians from their most formidable oppressor; yet the Goths may have been the innocent authors of their calamities. The passions and the policy of the Emperor were concurrent motives for his hostility. The Christians were now a recognised body in the state; however carefully they might avoid mingling in the political factions of the empire, they were necessarily of the party of the Emperor, whose favour they had enjoyed. His enemies became their enemies. Maximin persecuted those who had appeared at the court of Alexander Severus; Decius hated the adherents, as he supposed, Decius. A. D. 249—251.

BOOK II.

the partisans, of the murdered Philip.* The Gothic war shook to the centre the edifice of Roman greatness. Roman Paganism discovered in the relaxed morals of the people one of the causes of the decline of the empire; it demanded the revival of the censorship. This indiscriminating feeling would mistake, in the blindness of aversion and jealousy, the great silent corrective of the popular morality, for one of the principal causes of depravation. The partial protection of a foreign religion by a foreign Emperor (now that Christianity had begun to erect temple against temple, altar against altar, and the Christian bishop met the pontiff on equal terms around the imperial throne), would be considered among the flagrant departures from the sound wisdom of ancient Rome. The descendant of the Decii, however his obscure Pannonian birth might cast a doubt on his hereditary dignity, was called upon to restore the religion as well as the manners of Rome to their ancient austere purity; to vindicate its insulted supremacy from the rivalship of an Asiatic and modern superstition. The persecution of Decius endeavoured to purify Rome itself from the presence of these degenerate enemies to her prosperity. The bishop Fabianus was one of the first victims of his resentment; and the Christians did not venture to raise a successor to the obnoxious office during the brief reign of Decius. The example of the capital was followed in many of the great cities of the

Causes of the Decian persecution.

Fabianus, Bishop of Rome.

* Euseb. vi. 39.

empire. In the turbulent and sanguinary Alexandria, the zeal of the populace outran that of the Emperor, and had already commenced a violent local persecution.* Antioch lamented the loss of her bishop, Babylas, whose relics were afterwards worshipped in what was still the voluptuous grove of Daphne. Origen was exposed to cruel torments, but escaped with his life. But Christian enthusiasm, by being disseminated over a wider sphere, had naturally lost some of its first vigour. With many, it was now an hereditary faith, not embraced by the ardent conviction of the individual, but instilled into the mind, with more or less depth, by Christian education. The Christian writers now begin to deplore the failure of genuine Christian principles, and to trace the divine wrath in the affliction of the churches. Instead of presenting, as it were, a narrow, but firm and unbroken, front to the enemy, a much more numerous, but less united and less uniformly resolute, force now marched under the banner of Christianity. Instead of the serene fortitude with which they formerly appeared before the tribunal of the magistrate, many now stood pale, trembling, and reluctant, neither ready to submit to the idolatrous ceremony of sacrifice, nor prepared to resist even unto death. The fiery zeal of the African churches appears to have been most subject to these paroxysms of weakness†; it was there that the fallen, the Lapsi, formed a distinct and too nume-

Enthusiasm of Christianity less strong.

* Euseb. vi. 40, 41. † Dionysius apud Eusebium, vi. 41.

BOOK II.

rous class, whose readmission into the privileges of the faithful became a subject of fierce controversy*; and the Libellatici, who had purchased a billet of immunity from the rapacious government, formed another party, and were held in no less disrepute by those who, in the older spirit of the faith, had been ready or eager to obtain the crown of martyrdom.

Carthage was disgraced by the criminal weakness even of some among her clergy. A council was held to decide this difficult point; and the decisions of the council were tempered by moderation and humanity. None were perpetually and for ever excluded from the pale of salvation; but they were absolved, according to the degree of criminality which might attach to their apostacy. Those who sacrificed, the most awful and scarcely expiable offence, required long years of penitence and humility; those who had only weakly compromised their faith, by obtaining or purchasing billets of exemption from persecution, were admitted to shorter and easier terms of reconciliation.†

* The severer opinion was called the heresy of Novatian; charity and orthodoxy, on this occasion, concurred. Euseb. vi. sub fin., vii. 4, 5. Another controversy arose on the rebaptizing heretics, in which Cyprian took the lead of the severer party. Euseb. vii. 3.

† The horror with which those who had sacrificed were beheld by the more rigorous of their brethren may be conceived from the energetic language of Cyprian:—Nonne quando ad Capitolium sponte ventum est, quando ultro ad obsequium diri facinoris accessum est, labavit gressus, caligavit aspectus, tremuerunt viscera, brachia conciderunt? Nonne sensus obstupuit, lingua hæsit, sermo defecit? . . Nonne ara illa, quo moriturus accessit, rogus illi fuit? Nonne diaboli altare quod fœtore tætro fumare et redolere conspexerat, velut funus et bustum vitæ suæ horrere, ac fugere debebat. . . Ipse ad aram hostia, victima ipse venisti. Immolâsti illic salutem tuam, spem tuam, fidem tuam, funestis illis ignibus concremâsti. Cyprian, de Lapsis. Some died of remorse; with some the guilty food acted as poison. But the

CHAP. VIII.

Valerian. A. D. 254.

Valerian, who ascended the throne three years after the death of Decius, had been chosen by Decius to revive, in his person, the ancient and honourable office of censor; and the general admiration of his virtues had ratified the appointment of the Emperor. It was no discredit to Christianity that the commencement of the censor's reign, who may be supposed to have examined with more than ordinary care its influence on the public morals, was favourable to their cause. Their security was restored; and, for a short time, persecution ceased. The change which took place in the sentiments and conduct of Valerian is attributed to the influence of a man deeply versed in magical arts.* The censor was enslaved by a superstition which the older Romans would have beheld with little less abhorrence than Christianity itself. It must be admitted, that Christian superstition was too much inclined to encroach upon the province of Oriental magic; and the more the older Polytheism decayed, the more closely it allied itself with this powerful agent in commanding the fears of man. The adepts in those dark and forbidden sciences were probably more influential opponents of Christianity with all classes, from the Emperor,

following was the most extraordinary occurrence of which Cyprian declares himself to have been an eyewitness. An infant had been abandoned by its parents in their flight. The nurse carried it to the magistrate. Being too young to eat meat, bread, steeped in wine offered in sacrifice, was forced into its mouth. Immmediately that it returned to the Christians, the child, which could not speak, communicated the sense of its guilt by cries and convulsive agitations. It refused the sacrament (then administered to infants), closed its lips, and averted its face. The deacon forced it into its mouth. The consecrated wine would not remain in the contaminated body, but was cast up again. — In what a high-wrought state of enthusiasm must men have been who would relate and believe such statements as miraculous?

* Euseb. vii. 10.

BOOK II.

who employed their mystic arts to inquire into the secrets of futurity, to the peasant, who shuddered at their power, than the ancient and established priesthood.

Macrianus is reported to have obtained such complete mastery over the mind of Valerian, as to induce him to engage in the most guilty mysteries of magic, to trace the fate of the empire in the entrails of human victims. The edict against the Christians, suggested by the animosity of Macrianus, allowed the community to remain in undisturbed impunity; but subjected all the bishops who refused to conform, to the penalty of death; and seized all the endowments of their churches into the public treasury.

A. D. 257.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

The dignity of one of its victims conferred a melancholy celebrity on the persecution of Valerian. The most distinguished prelate at this time in Western Christendom was Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. If not of honourable birth or descent, for this appears doubtful, his talents had raised him to eminence and wealth. He taught rhetoric at Carthage, and, either by this honourable occupation, or by some other means, had acquired an ample fortune. Cyprian was advanced in life when he embraced the doctrines of Christianity; but he entered on his new career, if with the mature reason of age, with the ardour and freshness of youth. His wealth was devoted to pious and charitable uses; his rhetorical studies, if they gave clearness and order to his language, by no means chilled its fervour or constrained its vehemence. He had the African temperament of character, and, if

it may be so said, of style; the warmth, the power of communicating its empassioned sentiments to the reader; perhaps not all the pregnant conciseness, nor all the energy, of Tertullian, but, at the same time, little of his rudeness and obscurity. Cyprian passed rapidly through the steps of Christian initiation, almost as rapidly through the first gradations of the clerical order. On the vacancy of the bishopric of Carthage, his reluctant diffidence was overpowered by the acclamations of the whole city, who environed his house, and compelled him by their friendly violence to assume the distinguished and, it might be, dangerous office. He yielded, to preserve the peace of the city.*

Cyprian entertained the loftiest notions of the episcopal authority. The severe and inviolable unity of the outward and visible Church appeared to him an integral part of Christianity; and the rigid discipline enforced by the episcopal order the only means of maintaining that unity. The pale which enclosed the church from the rest of mankind was drawn with the most relentless precision. It was the ark, and all without it were left to perish in the unsparing deluge.† The growth of heretical discord or disobedience was inexpiable, even by the blood of the transgressor. He might bear the flames with equanimity; he might submit to be torn to pieces by wild beasts — there could be no martyr *without* the church. Tortures and death

* Epist. xiv.

† Si potuit evadere quisquam, qui extra arcam Noe fuit, et qui extra ecclesiam foris fuerit, evadit. Cyprian, de Unitate Ecclesiæ.

BOOK II.

bestowed not the crown of immortality; they were but the just retribution of treason to the faith.*

The fearful times which arose during his episcopate tried these stern and lofty principles, as the questions which arose out of the Decian persecutions did his judgment and moderation. Cyprian, who embraced without hesitation the severer opinion with regard to the rebaptizing heretics, notwithstanding his awful horror of the guilt of apostacy, acquiesced in, if he did not dictate, the more temperate decisions of the Carthaginian synod concerning those whose weakness had betrayed them either into the public denial, or a timid dissimulation, of the faith.

The first rumour of persecution designated the Bishop of Carthage for its victim. "Cyprian to the lions!" was the loud and unanimous outcry of infuriated Paganism. Cyprian withdrew from the storm, not, as his subsequent courageous behaviour showed, from timidity; but neither approving that useless and sometimes ostentatious prodigality of life, which betrayed more pride than humble acquiescence in the divine will; possibly from the truly charitable reluctance to tempt his enemies to an irretrievable crime. He withdrew to some quiet and secure retreat, from which he wrote animating and consolatory letters to those who had not been

* Esse martyr non potest, qui in ecclesiâ non est.

Ardeant licet flammis et ignibus traditi, vel objecti bestiis animas suas ponant, non erit illa fidei corona, sed pœna perfidiæ, nec religiosæ virtutis exitus gloriosus, sed desperationis interitus. De Unit. Eccles.

Et tamen neque hoc baptisma (sanguinis) heretico prodest, quamvis Christum confessus, et extra ecclesiam fuerit occisus. Epist. lxxiii.

"Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." 1 Cor. xiii. 3. — Is there no difference between the spirit of St. Paul and of Cyprian?

so prudent or so fortunate as to escape the persecution. His letters describe the relentless barbarity with which the Christians were treated; they are an authentic and cotemporary statement of the sufferings which the Christians endured in defence of their faith. If highly coloured by the generous and tender sympathies, or by the ardent eloquence of Cyprian, they have nothing of legendary extravagance. The utmost art was exercised to render bodily suffering more acute and intense; it was a continued strife between the obstinacy and inventive cruelty of the tormentor, and the patience of the victim.* During the reign of Decius, which appears to have been one continued persecution, Cyprian stood aloof in his undisturbed retreat. He returned to Carthage probably on the commencement of Valerian's reign, and had a splendid opportunity of Christian revenge upon the city which had thirsted for his blood. A plague ravaged the whole Roman world, and its most destructive violence thinned the streets of Carthage. It went spreading on from house to house, especially those of the lower orders, with awful regularity. The streets were strewn with the bodies of the dead and the dying, who vainly appealed to the laws of nature and humanity for that assistance of which those who passed them by, might soon stand in

Plague in Carthage.

* Tolerâstis usque ad consummationem gloriæ durissimam questionem, nec cessistis suppliciis, sed vobis potius supplicia cesserunt.

Steterunt tuti torquentibus fortiores, et pulsantes et laniantes ungulas pulsata ac laniata membra vicerunt. Inexpugnabilem fidem superare non potuit sæviens diu plaga repetita quamvis ruptâ compage viscerum; torquerentur in servis Dei jam non membra, sed vulnera. Cyprian, Epist. viii. ad Martyres. Compare Epist. lxii.

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need. General distrust spread through society. Men avoided or exposed their nearest relatives; as if, by excluding the dying, they could exclude death.* No one, says the deacon Pontius, writing of the population of Carthage in general, did as he would be done by. Cyprian addressed the Christians in the most earnest and effective language. He exhorted them to show the sincerity of their belief in the doctrines of their master, not by confining their acts of kindliness to their own brotherhood, but by extending them indiscriminately to their enemies. The city was divided into districts; offices were assigned to all the Christians; the rich lavished their wealth, the poor their personal exertions; and men, perhaps just emerged from the mine or the prison, with the scars or the mutilations of their recent tortures upon their bodies, were seen exposing their lives, if possible, to a more honourable martyrdom; as before the voluntary victims of Christian faith, so now of Christian charity. Yet the Heathen party, instead of being subdued, persisted in attributing this terrible scourge to the impiety of the Christians, which provoked the angry gods; nor can we wonder if the zeal of Cyprian retorted the argument, and traced rather the retributive justice of the Almighty for the wanton persecutions inflicted on the unoffending Christians.

A. D. 252. Conduct of Cyprian and the Christians.

Cyprian did not again withdraw on the commencement of the Valerian persecution. He was

Cyprian's retreat.

* Pontius, in Vitâ Cypriani. Horrere omnes, fugere, vitare contagium; exponere suos impie; quasi cum illo pestè morituro, etiam mortem ipsam aliquis posset excludere.

summoned before the proconsul, who communicated his instructions from the Emperor, to compel all those who professed foreign religions to offer sacrifice. Cyprian refused, with tranquil determination. He was banished from Carthage. He remained in his pleasant retreat, rather than place of exile, in the small town of Ceribis, near the sea-shore, in a spot shaded with verdant groves, and with a clear and healthful stream of water. It was provided with every comfort and even luxury, in which the austere nature of Cyprian would permit itself to indulge.* But when his hour came, the tranquil and collected dignity of Cyprian in no respect fell below his lofty principles.

Return to Carthage.

On the accession of a new proconsul, Galerius Maximus, Cyprian was either recalled or permitted to return from his exile. He resided in his own gardens, from whence he received a summons to appear before the proconsul. He would not listen to the earnest solicitations of his friends, who entreated him again to consult his safety by withdrawing to some place of concealment. His trial was postponed for a day; he was treated, while in custody, with respect and even delicacy. But the intelligence of the apprehension of Cyprian drew together the whole city; the Heathen, eager to behold the spectacle of his martyrdom, the Christians, to watch in their affectionate zeal at the doors of his prison. In the morning, he had to walk some

* "If," says Pontius, who visited his master in his retirement, "instead of this sunny and agreeable spot, it had been a waste and rocky solitude, the angels which fed Elijah and Daniel would have ministered to the holy Cyprian."

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distance, and was violently heated by the exertion. A Christian soldier offered to procure him dry linen, apparently from mere courtesy, but, in reality, to obtain such precious relics, steeped in the "bloody sweat" of the martyr. Cyprian intimated that it was useless to seek remedy for inconveniences which, perhaps, that day would pass away for ever. After a short delay, the proconsul appeared. The examination was brief: — "Art thou Thascius Cyprian, the bishop of so many impious men? The most sacred Emperor commands thee to sacrifice." Cyprian answered, "I will not sacrifice." "Consider well," rejoined the proconsul. "Execute your orders," answered Cyprian; "the case admits of no consideration."

Galerius consulted with his council, and then reluctantly* delivered his sentence. "Thascius Cyprian, thou hast lived long in thy impiety, and assembled around thee many men involved in the same wicked conspiracy. Thou hast shown thyself an enemy alike to the gods and the laws of the empire; the pious and sacred Emperors have in vain endeavoured to recal thee to the worship of thy ancestors. Since then thou hast been the chief author and leader of these most guilty practices, thou shalt be an example to those whom thou hast deluded to thy unlawful assemblies. Thou must expiate thy crime with thy blood." Cyprian said, "God be thanked."† The Bishop of Carthage

* In the Acta, vix ægrè is the expression; it may however mean that he spoke with difficulty, on account of his bad health.

† I have translated this sentence, as the Acts of Cyprian are remarkable for their simplicity, and total absence of later legendary

was carried into a neighbouring field and beheaded. He maintained his serene composure to the last. It was remarkable that but a few days afterwards the proconsul died. Though he had been in bad health, this circumstance was not likely to be lost upon the Christians.

Miserable death of the persecutors of Christianity.

Every where, indeed, the public mind was no doubt strongly impressed with the remarkable fact, which the Christians would lose no opportunity of enforcing on the awe-struck attention, that their enemies appeared to be the enemies of Heaven. An early and a fearful fate appeared to be the inevitable lot of the persecutors of Christianity. Their profound and earnest conviction that the hand of Divine Providence was perpetually and visibly interposing in the affairs of men would not be so deeply imbued with the spirit of their Divine Master, as to suppress the language of triumph, or even of vengeance, when the enemies of their God and of themselves either suffered defeat and death, or, worse than an honourable death, a cruel and insulting captivity. The death of Decius, according to the Pagan account, was worthy of the old republic. He was environed by the Goths; his son was killed by an arrow; he cried aloud, that the loss of a single soldier was nothing to the glory of the empire; he renewed the battle, and fell valiantly. The Christian writers strip away all

ornament; and particularly for the circumstantial air of truth with which they do justice to the regularity of the whole proceeding. Compare the Life of Cyprian by the Deacon Pontius; the Acts, in Ruinart, p. 216.; Cave's Lives of the Apostles, &c., art. Cyprian.

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the more ennobling incidents. According to their account, having been decoyed by the enemy, or misled by a treacherous friend, into a marsh where he could neither fight nor fly, he perished tamely, and his unburied body was left to the beasts and carrion fowls.* The captivity of Valerian, the mystery which hung over his death, allowed ample scope to the imagination of those whose national hatred of the barbarians would attribute the most unmanly ferocity to the Persian conqueror, and of those who would consider their God exalted by the most cruel and debasing sufferings inflicted on the oppressor of the church. Valerian, it was said, was forced to bend his back that the proud conqueror might mount his horse, as from a footstool; his skin was flayed off, according to one more modern account, while he was alive, stuffed, and exposed to the mockery of the Persian rabble.

Gallienus alone. A. D. 260.

The luxurious and versatile Gallienus restored peace to the church. The edict of Valerian was rescinded; the bishops resumed their public functions; the buildings were restored, and their property, which had been confiscated by the state, restored to the rightful owners.†

Aurelian. A. D. 271—275.

The last transient collision of Christianity with the government before its final conflict under Dioclesian, took place, or was at least threatened, during the administration of the great Aurelian. The reign of Aurelian, occupied by warlike cam-

* Orat. Constant. apud Euseb. c. xxiv. Lactant. de Mort. Persec.

† Euseb. vii. 13.; x. 23.

paigns in every part of the world, left little time for attention to the internal police, or the religious interests, of the empire. The mother of Aurelian was priestess of the sun at Sirmium, and the Emperor built a temple to that deity, his tutelary god, at Rome. But the dangerous wars of Aurelian required the concurrent aid of all the deities who took an interest in the fate of Rome. The sacred ceremony of consulting the Sibylline books, in whose secret and mysterious leaves were written the destinies of Rome, took place at his command. The severe Emperor reproaches the senate for their want of faith in these mystic volumes, or of zeal in the public service, as though they had been infected by the principles of Christianity.

But no hostile measures were taken against Christianity in the early part of his reign; and he was summoned to take upon himself the extraordinary office of arbiter in a Christian controversy. A new empire seemed rising in the East, under the warlike Queen of Palmyra. Zenobia extended her protection, with politic indifference, to Jew, to Pagan, and to Christian. It might almost appear that a kindred spiritual ambition animated her favourite, Paul of Samosata, the Bishop of Antioch, and that he aspired to found a new religion, adapted to the kingdom of Palmyra, by blending together the elements of Paganism, of Judaism, and of Christianity. Ambitious, dissolute, and rapacious, according to the representation of his adversaries, Paul of Samosata had been advanced to the important see of Antioch; but the zealous vigilance of the neigh-

Paul of Samosata.

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bouring bishops soon discovered that Paul held opinions, as to the mere human nature of the Saviour, more nearly allied to Judaism than to the Christian creed. The pride, the wealth, the state of Paul, no less offended the feelings, and put to shame the more modest demeanour and humbler pretensions of former prelates. He had obtained, either from the Roman authorities or from Zenobia, a civil magistracy, and prided himself more on his title of ducenary than of Christian bishop. He passed through the streets environed by guards, and preceded and followed by multitudes of attendants and supplicants, whose petitions he received and read with the stately bearing of a public officer rather than the affability of a prelate. His conduct in the ecclesiastical assemblies was equally overbearing: he sate on a throne, and while he indulged himself in every kind of theatric gesture, resented the silence of those who did not receive him with applause, or pay homage to his dignity. His magnificence disturbed the modest solemnity of the ordinary worship. Instead of the simpler music of the church, the hymns, in which the voices of the worshippers mingled in fervent, if less harmonious, unison, Paul organised a regular choir, in which the soft tones of female voices, in their more melting and artificial cadences, sometimes called to mind the voluptuous rites of Paganism, and could not be heard without shuddering by those accustomed to the more unadorned ritual.* The Ho-

* Ὃν καὶ ἀκουσας ἂν τις φρίξειεν. Such is the expression in the decree of excommunication issued by the bishops. Euseb. vii. 30.

sannas, sometimes introduced as a kind of salutation to the bishop, became, it was said, the chief part of the service, which was rather to the glory of Paul than of the Lord. This introduction of a new and effeminate ceremonial would of itself, with its rigid adversaries, have formed a ground for the charge of dissolute morals, against which may be fairly urged the avowed patronage of the severe Zenobia.* But the pomp of Paul's expenditure did not interfere with the accumulation of considerable wealth, which he extorted from the timid zeal of his partisans; and, it was said, by the venal administration of the judicial authority of his episcopate, perhaps of his civil magistracy. But Paul by no means stood alone; he had a powerful party among the ecclesiastical body, the chorepiscopi of the country districts, and the presbyters of the city. He set at defiance the synod of bishops, who pronounced a solemn sentence of excommunication†; and secure under the protection of the Queen of Palmyra, if her ambition should succeed in wresting Syria, with its noble capital, from the power of Rome, and in maintaining her strong and influential position between the conflicting powers of Persia and the Empire, Paul might hope to share in her triumph, and establish his degenerate but splendid form of Christianity in the very seat of its primitive Apostolic foundation. Paul had staked his success upon that of his warlike patroness; and on the fall of

* Compare Routh, Reliq. Sacr. ii. 505.

† See the sentence in Eusebius, vii. 30., and in Routh, Reliquiæ Sacræ, ii. 465., et seq.

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Zenobia, the bishops appealed to Aurelian to expel the rebel against their authority, and the partisan of the Palmyrenes, who had taken arms against the majesty of the empire, from his episcopal dignity at Antioch. Aurelian did not altogether refuse to interfere in this unprecedented cause, but, with laudable impartiality, declined any actual cognisance of the affair, and transferred the sentence from the personal enemies of Paul, the Bishops of Syria, to those of Rome and Italy. By their sentence, Paul was degraded from his episcopate.

The sentiments of Aurelian changed towards Christianity near the close of his reign. The severity of his character, reckless of human blood, would not, if committed in the strife, have hesitated at any measures to subdue the rebellious spirit of his subjects. Sanguinary edicts were issued, though his death prevented their general promulgation; and in the fate of Aurelian the Christians discovered another instance of the Divine vengeance, which appeared to mark their enemies with the sign of inevitable and appalling destruction.

Till the reign of Dioclesian, the churches reposed in undisturbed but enervating security.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PERSECUTION UNDER DIOCLESIAN.

THE final contest between Paganism and Christianity drew near. Almost three hundred years had elapsed since the divine Author of the new religion had entered upon his mortal life in a small village in Palestine *; and now, having gained so powerful an ascendancy over the civilised world, the Gospel was to undergo its last and most trying ordeal, before it should assume the reins of empire, and become the established religion of the Roman world. It was to sustain the deliberate and systematic attack of the temporal authority, arming, in almost every part of the empire, in defence of the ancient Polytheism. At this crisis, it is important to survey the state of Christianity, as well as the character of the sovereign, and of the government, which made this ultimate and most vigorous attempt to suppress the triumphant progress of the new faith. The last fifty years, with a short interval of menaced, probably of actual, persecution, during the reign of Aurelian, had passed in peace and security. The Christians had become not merely a public, but an imposing and influential, body; their separate existence had been recognised by the law

A. D. 284.

Peace of the Christians.

* Dioclesian began his reign A. D. 284. The commencement of the persecution is dated A. C. 303.

of Gallienus; their churches had arisen in most of the cities of the empire; as yet, probably, with no great pretensions to architectural grandeur, though no doubt ornamented by the liberality of the worshippers, and furnished with vestments and chalices, lamps, and chandeliers of silver. The number of these buildings was constantly on the increase, or the crowding multitudes of proselytes demanded the extension of the narrow and humble walls. The Christians no longer declined, or refused to aspire to the honours of the state. They filled offices of distinction, and even of supreme authority, in the provinces, and in the army; they were exempted either by tacit connivance, or direct indulgence, from the accustomed sacrifices. Among the more immediate attendants on the Emperor, two or three openly professed the Christian faith; Prisca the wife, and Valeria, the daughter of Dioclesian, and the wife of Galerius, were suspected, if not avowed, partakers in the Christian mysteries.* If it be impossible to form the most remote approximation to their relative numbers with that of the Pagan population; it is equally erroneous to estimate their strength and influence by numerical calculation. All political changes are wrought by a compact, organised, and disciplined minority. The mass of mankind are shown by experience, and appear fated, by the constitution of our nature, to follow any vigorous impulse from a determined and incessantly aggressive few.

Progress of Christianity.

* Euseb. Ecc. Hist. viii. 1.

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The long period of prosperity had produced in the Christian community its usual consequences, some relaxation of morals: but Christian charity had probably suffered more than Christian purity. The more flourishing and extensive the community, the more the pride, perhaps the temporal advantages of superiority, predominated over the Christian motives, which led men to aspire to the supreme functions in the church. Sacerdotal domination began to exercise its awful powers, and the bishop to assume the language and the authority of the vicegerent of God. Feuds distracted the bosom of the peaceful communities, and disputes sometimes proceeded to open violence. Such is the melancholy confession of the Christians themselves, who, according to the spirit of the times, considered the dangers and the afflictions to which they were exposed in the light of divine judgments; and deplored, perhaps with something of the exaggeration of religious humiliation, the visible decay of holiness and peace.* But it is the strongest proof of the firm hold of a party, whether religious or political, upon the public mind, when it may offend with impunity against its own primary principles. That which at one time is a sign of incurable weakness, or approaching dissolution, at another seems but the excess of healthful energy and the evidence of unbroken vigour.

Relaxation of Christian morals.

Of Christian charity.

The acts of Dioclesian are the only trustworthy history of his character. The son of a slave, or, at

Dioclesian.

* Euseb. Ecc. Hist. viii. 1.

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all events, born of obscure and doubtful parentage, who could force his way to sovereign power, conceive and accomplish the design of reconstructing the whole empire, must have been a man, at least, of strong political courage, of profound, if not always wise, and statesmanlike views. In the person of Dioclesian, the Emperor of Rome became an Oriental monarch. The old republican forms were disdainfully cast aside; consuls and tribunes gave way to new officers, with adulatory and un-Roman appellations. Dioclesian himself assumed the new title of Dominus or Lord, which gave offence even to the servile and flexible religion of his Pagan subjects, who reluctantly, at first, paid the homage of adoration to the master of the world.

Change in the state of the empire.

Nor was the ambition of Dioclesian of a narrow or personal character. With the pomp, he did not affect the solitude, of an Eastern despot. The necessity of the state appeared to demand the active and perpetual presence of more than one person invested in sovereign authority, who might organise the decaying forces of the different divisions of the empire, against the menacing hosts of barbarians on every frontier. Two Augusti and two Cæsars shared the dignity and the cares of the public administration * — a measure, if expedient for the security, fatal to the prosperity, of the exhausted provinces, which found themselves burdened with the maintenance of four imperial

* In the Leben Constantins des Grossen, by Manso, there is a good discussion on the authority and relative position of the Augusti and the Cæsars.

establishments. A new system of taxation was imperatively demanded, and relentlessly introduced *, while the Emperor seemed to mock the bitter and ill-suppressed murmurs of the provinces, by his lavish expenditure in magnificent and ornamental buildings. That was attributed to the avarice of Dioclesian, which arose out of the change in the form of government, and in some degree out of his sumptuous taste in that particular department, the embellishment, not of Rome only, but of the chief cities of the Empire — Milan, Carthage, and Nicomedia. At one time, the all-pervading government aspired, after a season of scarcity, to regulate the prices of all commodities, and of all interchange, whether of labour or of bargain and sale, between man and man. This singular and gigantic effort of well-meant, but mistaken despotism, has come to light in the present day.†

Neglect of Rome.

Among the innovations introduced by Dioclesian, none, perhaps, was more closely connected with the interests of Christianity than the virtual degradation of Rome from the capital of the empire, by the constant residence of the Emperor in other cities. Though the old metropolis was not altogether neglected in the lavish expenditure of the public wealth upon new edifices, either for the convenience of the people or the splendour of public solemnities, yet a larger share fell to the lot

* The extension of the rights of citizenship to the whole empire by Caracalla made it impossible to maintain the exemptions and immunities which that privilege had thus lavishly conferred.

† Edict of Dioclesian, published and illustrated by Col. Leake. It is alluded to in the Treatise de Mortibus. Persecut. c. vii.

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of other towns, particularly of Nicomedia.* In this city, the Emperor more frequently displayed the new state of his imperial court, while Rome was rarely honoured by his presence; nor was his retreat, when wearied with political strife, on the Campanian coast, in the Bay of Baiæ, which the older Romans had girt with their splendid seats of retirement and luxury; it was on the Illyrian and barbarous side of the Adriatic that the palace of Dioclesian arose, and his agricultural establishment spread its narrow belt of fertility. The removal of the seat of government more clearly discovered the magnitude of the danger to the existing institutions from the progress of Christianity. The East was, no doubt, more fully peopled with Christians than any part of the Western world, unless, perhaps, the province of Africa; at all events, their relative rank, wealth, and importance, were much more nearly balanced than that of the adherents of the old Polytheism.† In Rome, the ancient majesty of the national religion must still have

* Ita semper dementabat, Nicodemiam studens urbi Romæ coæquare. De Mort. Persecut. c. 7.

† Tertullian, Apolog. c. 37. Mr. Coneybeare (Bampton Lectures, page 345.) has drawn a curious inference from a passage in this chapter of Tertullian, that the majority of those who had a right of citizenship in those cities had embraced the Christian faith, while the mobs were its most furious opponents. It appears unquestionable that the strength of Christianity lay in the middle, perhaps the mercantile, classes. The two last books of the Paidagogos of Clement of Alexandria, the most copious authority for Christian manners at that time, inveighs against the vices of an opulent and luxurious community, splendid dresses, jewels, gold and silver vessels, rich banquets, gilded litters and chariots, and private baths. The ladies kept Indian birds, Median peacocks, monkeys, and Maltese dogs, instead of maintaining widows and orphans; the men had multitudes of slaves. The sixth chapter of the third book—"that the Christian alone is rich," would have been unmeaning if addressed to a poor community.

kept down in comparative obscurity the aspiring rivalry of Christianity. The Prætor still made way for the pontifical order, and submitted his fasces to the vestal virgin, while the Christian bishop pursued his humble and unmarked way. The modest church or churches of the Christians lay hid, no doubt, in some sequestered street, or in the obscure Transteverine region, and did not venture to contrast themselves with the stately temples on which the ruling people of the world, and the sovereigns of mankind, had for ages lavished their treasures. However the church of the metropolis of the world might maintain a high rank in Christian estimation, might boast its antiquity, its Apostolic origin, or at least of being the scene of Apostolic martyrdom, and might number many distinguished proselytes in all ranks, even in the imperial court; still Paganism, in this stronghold of its most gorgeous pomp, its hereditary sanctity, its intimate connection with all the institutions, and its incorporation with the whole ceremonial of public affairs; in Rome, must have maintained at least its outward supremacy.* But, in comparison

* In a letter of Cornelius, bishop of Rome, written during or soon after the reign of Decius, the ministerial establishment of the church in Rome is thus stated: — One bishop; forty-six presbyters; seven deacons; seven subdeacons; forty-two acolyths or attendants; fifty-two exorcists, readers, and doorkeepers; fifteen hundred widows and poor. Euseb. vi. 43.

Optatus, lib. ii., states that there were more than forty churches in Rome at the time of the persecution of Dioclesian. It has been usual to calculate one church for each presbyter; which would suppose a falling off, at least no increase, during the interval. But some of the presbyters reckoned by Cornelius may have been superannuated, or in prison, and their place supplied by others.

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with the less imposing dignity of the municipal government, or the local priesthood, the Bishop of Antioch or Nicomedia was a far greater person than the predecessor of the popes among the consulars and the senate, the hereditary aristocracy of the old Roman families, or the ministers of the ruling Emperor. In Nicomedia, the Christian church, an edifice at least of considerable strength and solidity, stood on an eminence commanding the town, and conspicuous above the palace of the sovereign.

Dioclesian might seem born to accomplish that revolution which took place so soon after, under the reign of Constantine. The new constitution of the empire might appear to require a reconstruction of the religious system. The Emperor, who had not scrupled to accommodate the form of the government, without respect to the ancient majesty of Rome, to the present position of affairs; to degrade the capital itself into the rank of a provincial city; and to prepare the way, at least, for the removal of the seat of government to the East, would have been withheld by no scruples of veneration for ancient rites, or ancestral ceremonies, if the establishment of a new religion had appeared to harmonise with his general policy. But his mind was not yet ripe for such a change; nor perhaps his knowledge of Christianity, and its profound and unseen influence, sufficiently extensive. In his assumption of the title Jovius, while his colleague took that of Herculius, Dioclesian gave a public pledge of his attachment to the old Poly-

Religion of Dioclesian.

theism. Among the cares of his administration, he by no means neglected the purification of the ancient religions.* In Paganism itself, that silent but manifest change, of which we have already noticed the commencement, had been creeping on. The new philosophic Polytheism which Julian attempted to establish on the ruins of Christianity was still endeavouring to supersede the older poetic faith of the Heathen nations. It had not even yet come to sufficient maturity to offer itself as a formidable antagonist to the religion of Christ. This new Paganism, as we have observed, arose out of the alliance of the philosophy and the religion of the old world. These once implacable adversaries had reconciled their difference, and coalesced against the common enemy. Christianity itself had no slight influence upon the formation of the new system; and now an Eastern element, more and more strongly dominant, mingled with the whole, and lent it, as it were, a visible object of worship. From Christianity, the new Paganism had adopted the unity of the Deity; and scrupled not to degrade all the gods of the older world into subordinate dæmons or ministers. The Christians had incautiously held the same language: both concurred in the name of dæmons; but the Pagans used the phrase in the Platonic sense, as good, but subordinate, spirits; while the same term spoke to the Christian ear as expressive of malignant and diabolic agency. But the Jupiter Optimus Maximus

New Paganism.

Worship of the sun.

* Veterrimæ religiones castissimè curatæ. Aurel. Vict. de Cæsar.

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was not the great supreme of the new system. The universal deity of the East, the Sun, to the philosophic was the emblem or representative, to the vulgar, the Deity. Dioclesian himself, though he paid so much deference to the older faith as to assume the title of Jovius, as belonging to the Lord of the world, yet, on his accession, when he would exculpate himself from all concern in the murder of his predecessor Numerian, he appealed in the face of the army to the all-seeing deity of the sun. It is the oracle of Apollo of Miletus, consulted by the hesitating Emperor, which is to decide the fate of Christianity. The metaphorical language of Christianity had unconsciously lent strength to this new adversary; and, in adoring the visible orb, some, no doubt, supposed that they were not departing far from the worship of the "Sun of Righteousness." *

But though it might enter into the imagination of an imperious and powerful sovereign to fuse together all these conflicting faiths, the new Paganism was beginning to advance itself as the open and most dangerous adversary of the religion of Christ. Hierocles, the great Hierophant of the Platonic Paganism, is distinctly named as the author of the persecution under Dioclesian. †

Thus, then, an irresistible combination of circumstances tended to precipitate the fatal crisis.

* Hermogenes, one of the older heresiarchs, applied the text "he has placed his tabernacle in the sun," to Christ, and asserted that Christ had put off his body in the sun. Pantænus apud Routh, Reliquiæ Sacræ, i. 339.

† Another philosophic writer published a work against the Christians. See Fleury, p. 452., from Tertullian.

The whole political scheme of Dioclesian was incomplete, unless some distinct and decided course was taken with these self-governed corporations, who rendered, according to the notions of the time, such imperfect allegiance to the sovereign power. But the cautious disposition of Dioclesian, his deeper insight, perhaps, into the real nature of the struggle which would take place; his advancing age, and, possibly, the latent and depressing influence of the malady which may then have been hanging over him, and which, a short time after, brought him to the brink of the grave *; these concurrent motives would induce him to shrink from violent measures; to recommend a more temporising policy; and to consent, with difficult reluctance, to the final committal of the imperial authority in a contest in which the complete submission of the opposite party could only be expected by those who were altogether ignorant of its strength. The imperial power had much to lose in an unsuccessful contest; it was likely to gain, if successful, only a temporary and external conquest. On the one hand, it was urged by the danger of permitting a vast and self-governed body to coexist with the general institutions of the empire; on the other, if not a civil war, a contest which would array one part of almost every city of the empire against

* The charge of derangement, which rests on the authority of Constantine, as related by Eusebius, is sufficiently confuted by the dignity of his abdication; the placid content with which he appeared to enjoy his peaceful retreat; the respect paid to him by his turbulent and ambitious colleagues; and the involuntary influence which he still appeared to exercise over the affairs of the empire.

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the other in domestic hostility, might appear even of more perilous consequence to the public welfare.

Sentiments of the philosophic party.

The party of the old religion, now strengthened by the accession of the philosophic faction, risked nothing, and might expect much, from the vigorous, systematic, and universal intervention of the civil authority. It was clear that nothing less would restore its superiority to the decaying cause of Polytheism. Nearly three centuries of tame and passive connivance, or of open toleration, had only increased the growing power of Christianity, while it had not in the least allayed that spirit of moral conquest which avowed that its ultimate end was the total extinction of idolatry.

But in the army, the parties were placed in more inevitable opposition; and in the army commenced the first overt acts of hostility, which were the prognostics of the general persecution.* No where did the old Roman religion retain so much hold upon the mind as among the sacred eagles. Without sacrifice to the givers of victory, the superstitious soldiery would advance, divested of their usual confidence, against the enemy; and defeat was ascribed to some impious omission in the ceremonial of propitiating the gods. The Christians now formed no unimportant part in the army: though permitted by the ruling authorities to abstain from idolatrous conformity, their contempt of the auspices which promised, and of the rites which insured, the divine favour, would be looked upon

* Ἐκ τῶν ἐν στρατείαις ἀδελφῶν καταρχομένου τοῦ διωγμοῦ. Euseb. viii. 1. Compare ch. iv.

with equal awe and animosity. The unsuccessful general, and the routed army, would equally seize every excuse to cover the misconduct of the one, or the cowardice of the other. In the pride of victory, the present deities of Rome would share the honour with Roman valour: the assistance of the Christians would be forgotten in defeat; the resentment of the gods, to whom that defeat would be attributed, would be ascribed to the impiety of their godless comrades. An incident of this kind took place, during one of his campaigns, in the presence of Dioclesian. The army was assembled around the altar; the sacrificing priest in vain sought for the accustomed signs in the entrails of the victim; the sacrifice was again and again repeated, but always with the same result. The baffled sooth-sayer, trembling with awe or with indignation, denounced the presence of profane strangers. The Christians had been seen, perhaps boasted, that they had made the sign of the cross, and put to flight the impotent dæmons of idolatrous worship. They were apprehended, and commanded to sacrifice; and a general edict issued that all who refused to pay honour to the martial deities of Rome should be expelled the army. It is far from improbable that frequent incidents of this nature may have occurred; if in the unsuccessful campaign of Galerius in the East, nothing was more likely to embitter the mind of that violent Emperor against the whole Christian community. Nor would this animosity be allayed by the success with which he retrieved his former failure. While the

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impiety of the Christians would be charged with all the odium of defeat, they would never be permitted to participate in the glories of victory.

Deliberations concerning Christianity.

During the winter of the year of Christ 302-3, the great question of the policy to be adopted towards the Christians was debated, first in a private conference between Dioclesian and Galerius. Dioclesian, though urged by his more vehement partner in the empire, was averse from sanguinary proceedings, from bloodshed and confusion; he was inclined to more temperate measures, which would degrade the Christians from every post of rank or authority, and expel them from the palace and the army. The palace itself was divided by conflicting factions. Some of the chief officers of Dioclesian's household openly professed Christianity; his wife and his daughter were at least favourably disposed to the same cause; while the mother of Galerius, a fanatical worshipper, probably of Cybele, was seized with a spirit of proselytism, and celebrated almost every day a splendid sacrifice, followed by a banquet, at which she required the presence of the whole court. The pertinacious resistance of the Christians provoked her implacable resentment; and her influence over her son was incessantly employed to inflame his mind to more active animosity. Dioclesian at length consented to summon a council, formed of some persons, versed in the administration of the law, and some military men. Of these, one party were already notoriously hostile to Christianity *,

Council.

* Hierocles, the philosopher, was probably a member of this council. Mosheim, p. 922.

the rest were courtiers, who bent to every intimation of the imperial favour. Dioclesian still prolonged his resistance*, till, either to give greater solemnity to the decree, or to identify their measures more completely with the cause of Polytheism, it was determined to consult the oracle of Apollo at Miletus. The answer of the oracle might be anticipated; and Dioclesian submitted to the irresistible united authority of his friends, of Galerius, and of the God, and contented himself with moderating the severity of the edict. Galerius proposed that all who refused to sacrifice should be burned alive: Dioclesian stipulated that there should be no loss of life. A fortunate day was chosen for the execution of the imperial decree. The feast of Terminalia was inseparably connected with the stability of the Roman power; that power which was so manifestly endangered by the progress of Christianity. At the dawn of day, the Præfect of the city appeared at the door of the church in Nicomedia, attended by the officers of the city and of the court. The doors were instantly thrown down; the Pagans beheld with astonishment the vacant space, and sought in vain for the statue of the deity. The sacred books were instantly burned, and the rest of the furniture of the building plundered by the tumultuous soldiery. The Emperors com-

Edict of persecution.

Its publication.

* According to the unfriendly representation of the author of the Treatise de Mort. Pers., whose view of Dioclesian's character is confirmed by Eutropius, it was the crafty practice of Dioclesian to assume all the merit of popular measures as emanating from himself alone, while in those which were unpopular, he pretended to act altogether by the advice of others.

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Its execution in Nicomedia.

manded from the palace a full view of the tumult and spoliation, for the church stood on a height at no great distance; and Galerius wished to enjoy the spectacle of a conflagration of the building. The more prudent Dioclesian, fearing that the fire might spread to the splendid buildings which adjoined it, suggested a more tardy and less imposing plan of demolition. The pioneers of the Prætorian guard advanced with their tools, and in a few hours the whole building was razed to the ground.

The Christians made no resistance, but awaited in silent consternation the promulgation of the fatal edict. On the next morning it appeared. It was framed in terms of the sternest and most rigorous proscription, short of the punishment of death. It comprehended all ranks and orders under its sweeping and inevitable provisions. Throughout the empire, the churches of the Christians were to be levelled with the earth; the public existence of the religion was thus to be annihilated. The sacred books were to be delivered, under pain of death, by their legitimate guardians, the bishops and presbyters, to the imperial officers, and publicly burnt. The philosophic party thus hoped to extirpate those pernicious writings with which they in vain contested the supremacy of the public mind.

The property of the churches, whether endowments in land or furniture, was confiscated; all public assemblies, for the purposes of worship, prohibited; the Christians of rank and distinction were degraded from all their offices, and declared incapable

of filling any situation of trust or authority; those of the plebeian order were deprived of the right of Roman citizenship, which secured the sanctity of their persons from corporal chastisement or torture; slaves were declared incapable of claiming or obtaining liberty; the whole race were placed without the pale of the law, disqualified from appealing to its protection in case of wrong, as of personal injury, of robbery, or adultery; while they were liable to civil actions, and bound to bear all the burdens of the state, and amenable to all its penalties. In many places, an altar was placed before the tribunal of justice, on which the plaintiff was obliged to sacrifice, before his cause could obtain a hearing.* CHAP. IX.

No sooner had this edict been affixed in the customary place, than it was torn down by the hand of a rash and indignant Christian, who added insult to his offence by a contemptuous inscription. "Such are the victories of the Emperors over the Goths and Sarmatians."† This outrage on the imperial majesty was expiated by the death of the delinquent, who avowed his glorious crime. Although less discreet Christians might secretly dignify the sufferings of the victim with the honours of martyrdom, they could only venture to approve the patience with which he bore the agony of being roasted alive by a slow fire.‡ Edict torn down.

The prudence or the moderation of Dioclesian had rejected the more violent and sanguinary coun-

* Euseb. viii. 2. De Mort. Persecut. apud Lactantium.
† Mosheim, de Reb. Christ.
‡ Euseb. viii. 5.

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Fire in the palace at Nicomedia.

sels of the Cæsar, who had proposed that all who refused to sacrifice should be burned alive. But his personal terrors triumphed over the lingering influence of compassion or justice. On a sudden, a fire burst out in the palace of Nicomedia, which spread almost to the chamber of the Emperor. The real origin of this fatal conflagration is unknown; and notwithstanding the various causes to which it was ascribed by the fears, the malice, and the superstition of the different classes, we may probably refer the whole to accident. It may have arisen from the hasty or injudicious construction of a palace built but recently. One account ascribes it to lightning. If this opinion obtained general belief among the Christian party, it would, no doubt, be considered by many, a visible sign of the Divine vengeance, on account of the promulgation of the imperial edict. The Christians were accused by the indignant voice of the Heathen; they retorted, by throwing the guilt upon the Emperor Galerius, who had practised (so the ecclesiastical historian suggests) the part of a secret incendiary, in order to criminate the Christians, and alarm Dioclesian into his more violent measures.*

The obvious impolicy of such a measure, as the chance of actually destroying both their imperial enemies in the fire, must have been very remote, and as it could only darken the subtle mind of Dioclesian with the blackest suspicions, and madden Galerius to more unmeasured hostility, must acquit the

* Euseb. viii. 6.

Christians of any such design, even if their high principles, their sacred doctrines of peaceful submission, even under the direst persecution, did not place them above all suspicion. The only Christian who would have incurred the guilt, or provoked upon his innocent brethren the danger inseparable from such an act, would have been some desperate fanatic, like the man who tore down the edict. And such a man would have avowed and gloried in the act; he would have courted the ill-deserved honours of martyrdom. The silence of Constantine may clear Galerius of the darker charge of contriving, by these base and indirect means, the destruction of a party against which he proceeded with undisguised hostility. Galerius, however, as if aware of the full effect, with which such an event would work on the mind of Dioclesian, immediately left Nicomedia, declaring that he could not consider his person safe within that city.

The consequences of this fatal conflagration were disastrous, to the utmost extent which their worst enemies could desire, to the whole Christian community. The officers of the household, the inmates of the palace, were exposed to the most cruel tortures, by the order, it is said, even in the presence, of Dioclesian. Even the females of the imperial family were not exempt, if from the persecution, from that suspicion which demanded the clearest evidence of their Paganism. Prisca and Valeria were constrained to pollute themselves with sacrifice; the powerful eunuchs, Dorotheus and Gorgonius, and Andreas, suffered death; An-

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thimus, the Bishop of Nicomedia, was beheaded. Many were executed, many burnt alive, many laid bound, with stones round their necks, in boats, rowed into the midst of the lake, and thrown into the water.

The persecution becomes general.

From Nicomedia, the centre of the persecution, the imperial edicts were promulgated, though with less than the usual rapidity, through the East; letters were despatched requiring the co-operation of the Western Emperors, Maximian, the associate of Dioclesian, and the Cæsar Constantius, in the restoration of the dignity of the ancient religion, and the suppression of the hostile faith. Constantius made a show of concurrence in the measures of his colleagues; he commanded the demolition of the churches, but abstained from all violence against the persons of the Christians.* Gaul alone, his favoured province, was not defiled by Christian blood. The fiercer temper of Maximian only awaited the signal, and readily acceded, to carry into effect the barbarous edicts of his colleagues.

April 18.

In almost every part of the world, Christianity found itself at once assailed by the full force of the civil power, constantly goaded on by the united influence of the Pagan priesthood and the philosophic party. Nor was Dioclesian, now committed in the desperate strife, content with the less tyrannical and sanguinary edict of Nicomedia. Vague

* Eusebius, whose panegyric on Constantine throws back some of its adulation upon his father, makes Constantius a Christian, with the Christian service regularly performed in his palace. Vit. Constant. c. 33. The exaggeration of this statement is exposed by Pagi, ad ann. 303, n. viii. Mosheim, de Rebus ante Const. Mag. p. 929—935.

rumours of insurrection, some tumultuary risings in regions which were densely peopled with Christians, and even the enforced assumption of the purple by two adventurers, one in Armenia, another in Antioch, seemed to countenance the charges of political ambition, and the design of armed and vigorous resistance.

It is the worst evil of religious contests that the civil power cannot retract without the humiliating confession of weakness, and must go on increasing in the severity of its measures. It soon finds that there is no success short of the extermination of the adversary; and it has but the alternative of acknowledged failure, and this internecine warfare. The demolition of the churches might remove objects offensive to the wounded pride of the dominant Polytheism; the destruction of the sacred books might gratify the jealous hostility of the philosophic party; but not a single community was dissolved. The precarious submission of the weaker Christians only confirmed the more resolute opposition of the stronger and more heroic adherents of Christianity.

Edict followed edict, rising in regular gradations of angry barbarity. The whole clergy were declared enemies of the state; they were seized whereever an hostile præfect chose to put forth his boundless authority; and bishops, presbyters, and deacons were crowded into the prisons intended for the basest malefactors. A new rescript prohibited the liberation of any of these prisoners, unless they should consent to offer sacrifice.

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During the promulgation of these rescripts, Dioclesian celebrated his triumph in Rome; he held a conference with the Cæsar of Africa, who entered into his rigorous measures. On his return to Nicomedia, he was seized with that long and depressing malady which, whether it affected him with temporary derangement, secluded him within the impenetrable precincts of the palace, whose sacred secrets were forbidden to be betrayed to the popular ear. This rigid concealment gave currency to every kind of gloomy rumour. The whole Roman world awaited with mingled anxiety, hope, and apprehension, the news of his dissolution. Dioclesian, to the universal astonishment, appeared again in the robes of empire; to their still greater astonishment, he appeared only to lay them aside, to abdicate the throne, and to retire to the peaceful occupation of his palace and agricultural villa on the Illyrian shore of the Adriatic. His colleague Maximian, with ill-dissembled reluctance, followed the example of his colleague, patron, and coadjutor in the empire.

Illness.

And abdication of Dioclesian, A. D. 304.

The great scheme of Dioclesian, the joint administration of the empire by associate Augusti, with their subordinate Cæsars, if it had averted for a time the dismemberment of the empire, and had introduced some vigour into the provincial governments, had introduced other evils of appalling magnitude; but its fatal consequences were more manifest directly the master hand was withdrawn which had organised the new machine of government. Fierce jealousy succeeded at once

among the rival Emperors, to decent concord; all subordination was lost; and a succession of civil wars between the contending sovereigns distracted the whole world. The earth groaned under the separate tyranny of its many masters; and, according to the strong expression of a rhetorical writer, the grinding taxation had so exhausted the proprietors and the cultivators of the soil, the merchants, and the artisans, that none remained to tax but beggars.* The sufferings of the Christians, however still inflicted with unremitting barbarity, were lost in the common sufferings of mankind. The rights of Roman citizenship, which had been violated in their persons, were now universally neglected; and, to extort money, the chief persons of the towns, the unhappy decuvions, who were responsible for the payment of the contributions, were put to the torture. Even the punishment, the roasting by a slow fire, — invented to force the conscience of the devout Christians, — was borrowed, in order to wring the reluctant impost from the unhappy provincial.

CHAP. IX.

General misery.

The abdication of Dioclesian left the most implacable enemy of Christianity, Galerius, master of the East; and in the East the persecution of the Christians, as well as the general oppression of the subjects of the empire, continued in unmitigated severity. His nephew, the Cæsar, Maximin Daias, was the legitimate heir to his relentless violence of temper, and to his stern hostility to the Christian name. In the West, the assumption of the purple

Galerius, Emperor of the East.

Maximin Daias.

* De Mort. Persecut. c. xxiii.

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by Maxentius, the son of the abdicated Maximian (Herculius), had no unfavourable effect on the situation of the Christians. They suffered only with the rest of their fellow subjects from the vices of Maxentius. If their matrons and virgins were not secure from his lust, it was the common lot of all, who, although of the highest rank and dignity, might attract his insatiable passions. If a Christian matron, the wife of a senator, submitted to a voluntary death* rather than to the loss of her honour, it was her beauty, not her Christianity, which marked her out as the victim of the tyrant. It was not until Constantine began to develope his ambitious views of reuniting the dismembered monarchy, that Maxentius threw himself, as it were, upon the ancient gods of Rome, and identified his own cause with that of Polytheism. At this juncture all eyes were turned towards the elder son of Constantius. If not already recognised by the prophetic glance of devout hope as the first Christian sovereign of Rome, he seemed placed by providential wisdom as the protector, as the head, of the Christian interest. The enemies of Christianity were his; and if he was not, as yet, bound by the hereditary attachment of a son to the religion of his mother Helena, his father Constantius had bequeathed him the wise example of humanity and toleration. Placed as a hostage in the hands of Galerius, Constantine had only escaped from the honourable captivity of the Eastern court, where he had been exposed to constant peril of his life, by

Maxentius.

Constantine.

* Euseb. viii. 14.

the promptitude and rapidity of his movements. He had fled, and during the first stages maimed the post-horses which might have been employed in his pursuit. During the persecution of Diocle-sian, Constantius alone, of all the Emperors, by a dexterous appearance of submission, had screened the Christians of Gaul from the common lot of their brethren. Nor was it probable that Constan-tine would render, on this point, more willing al-legiance to the sanguinary mandates of Galerius. At present, however, Constantine stood rather aloof from the affairs of Italy and the East; and till the resumption of the purple by the elder Maximian, his active mind was chiefly employed in the consolid-ation of his own power in Gaul, and the repulse of the German barbarians, who threatened the fron-tiers of the Rhine.

Notwithstanding the persecution had now lasted for six or seven years, in no part of the world did Christianity betray any signs of vital decay. It was far too deeply rooted in the minds of men, far too extensively promulgated, far too vigorously organised, not to endure this violent but unavailing shock. If its public worship was suspended, the believers met in secret, or cherished in the unas-sailable privacy of the heart, the inalienable rights of conscience. If it suffered numerical loss, the body was not weakened by the severance of its more feeble and worthless members. The inert re-sistance of the general mass wearied out the vex-atious and harassing measures of the government. Their numbers secured them against general ex-

A. D. 309.

Sufferings of the Christians.

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termination ; but, of course, the persecution fell most heavily upon the most eminent of the body ; upon men, who were deeply pledged by the sense of shame and honour, even, if in any case, the nobler motives of conscientious faith and courageous confidence in the truth of the religion were wanting, to bear with unyielding heroism the utmost barbarities of the persecutor. Those who submitted performed the hated ceremony with visible reluctance, with trembling hand, averted countenance, and deep remorse of heart ; those who resisted to death were animated by the presence of multitudes, who, if they dared not applaud, could scarcely conceal their admiration ; women crowded to kiss the hems of their garments, and their scattered ashes, or unburied bones, were stolen away by the devout zeal of their adherents, and already began to be treasured as incentives to faith and piety. It cannot be supposed that the great functionaries of the state, the civil or military governors, could be so universally seared to humanity, or so incapable of admiring these frequent examples of patient heroism, as not either to mitigate in some degree the sufferings which they were bound to inflict, or even to feel some secret sympathy with the blameless victims whom they condemned, which might ripen, at a more fortunate period, into sentiments still more favourable to the Christian cause.

The most signal and unexpected triumph of Christianity was over the author of the persecution. While victory and success appeared to follow that party in the state which, if they had not as yet

openly espoused the cause of Christianity, had unquestionably its most ardent prayers in their favour; the enemies of the Christians were smitten with the direst calamities, and the Almighty appeared visibly to exact the most awful vengeance for their sufferings. Galerius himself was forced, as it were, to implore mercy; not indeed in the attitude of penitence, but of profound humiliation, at the foot of the Christian altar. In the eighteenth year of his reign, the persecutor lay expiring of a most loathsome malady. A deep and fetid ulcer preyed on the lower regions of his body, and eat them away into a mass of living corruption. It is certainly singular that the disease, vulgarly called being "eaten of worms," should have been the destiny of Herod the Great, of Galerius, and of Philip II. of Spain. Physicians were sought from all quarters; every oracle was consulted in vain; that of Apollo suggested a cure, which aggravated the virulence of the disease. Not merely the chamber, the whole palace, of Galerius is described as infected by the insupportable stench which issued from his wound; while the agonies which he suffered might have satiated the worst vengeance of the most unchristian enemy.

Edict of Galerius, A. D. 311, April 30.

From the dying bed of Galerius issued an edict, which, while it condescended to apologise for the past severities against the Christians, under the specious plea of regard for the public welfare and the unity of the state; while it expressed compassion for his deluded subjects, whom the government was unwilling to leave in the forlorn con-

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dition of being absolutely without a religion, admitted to the fullest extent the total failure of the severe measures for the suppression of Christianity.* It permitted the free and public exercise of the Christian religion. Its close was still more remarkable; it contained an earnest request to the Christians to intercede for the suffering Emperor in their supplications to their God. Whether this edict was dictated by wisdom, by remorse, or by superstitious terror; whether it was the act of a statesman, convinced by experience of the impolicy, or even the injustice, of his sanguinary acts: whether, in the agonies of his excruciating disease, his conscience was harassed by the thought of his tortured victims; or, having vainly solicited the assistance of his own deities, he would desperately endeavour to propitiate the favour, or, at least, allay the wrath, of the Christians' God; the whole Roman world was witness of the public and humiliating acknowledgment of defeat, extorted from the dying Emperor. A few days after the promulgation of the edict, Galerius expired.

A. D. 311. May.

The edict was issued from Sardica, in the name of Galerius, of Licinius, and of Constantine. It accorded with the sentiments of the two latter: Maximin alone, the Cæsar of the East, whose peculiar jurisdiction extended over Syria and Egypt, rendered but an imperfect and reluctant obedience to the decree of toleration. His jealousy was, no doubt, excited by the omission of

* Euseb. E. H. viii. 17.

CHAP. IX.

Conduct of Maximin in the East.

his name in the preamble to the edict; and he seized this excuse to discountenance its promulgation in his provinces. Yet for a time he suppressed his profound and inveterate hostility to the Christian name. He permitted unwritten orders to be issued to the municipal governors of the towns, and to the magistrates of the villages, to put an end to all violent proceedings. The zeal of Sabinus, the Prætorian Præfect of the East, supposing the milder sentiments of Galerius to be shared by Maximin, seems to have outrun the intentions of the Cæsar. A circular rescript appeared in his name, echoing the tone, though it did not go quite to the length, of the imperial edict. It proclaimed, "that it had been the anxious wish of the divinity of the most mighty Emperors to reduce the whole empire to pay an harmonious and united worship to the immortal gods. But their clemency had at length taken compassion on the obstinate perversity of the Christians, and determined on desisting from their ineffectual attempts to force them to abandon their hereditary faith." The magistrates were instructed to communicate the contents of this letter to each other. The governors of the provinces, supposing at once that the letter of the Præfect contained the real sentiments of the Emperor, with merciful haste, despatched orders to all persons in subordinate civil or military command, the magistrates both of the towns and the villages, who acted upon them with unhesitating obedience.*

* Euseb. ix. 1.

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The cessation of the persecution showed at once its extent. The prison doors were thrown open; the mines rendered up their condemned labourers; every where long trains of Christians were seen hastening to the ruins of their churches, and visiting the places sanctified by their former devotion. The public roads, the streets, and market-places of the towns were crowded with long processions, singing psalms of thanksgiving for their deliverance. Those who had maintained their faith under these severe trials passed triumphant in conscious, even if lowly pride, amid the flattering congratulations of their brethren; those who had failed in the hour of affliction hastened to reunite themselves with their God, and to obtain readmission into the flourishing and reunited fold. The Heathen themselves were astonished, it is said, at this signal mark of the power of the Christians' God, who had thus unexpectedly wrought so sudden a revolution in favour of his worshippers.*

But the cause of the Christians might appear not yet sufficiently avenged. The East, the great scene of persecution, was not restored to prosperity or peace. It had neither completed nor expiated the eight years of relentless persecution. The six months of apparent reconciliation were occupied by the Cæsar Maximin in preparing measures of more subtile and profound hostility. The situation of Maximin himself was critical and precarious.

Maximin hostile to Christianity.

* Euseb. E. H. ix. 1.

CHAP. IX.

On the death of Galerius, he had seized on the government of the whole of Asia, and the forces of the two Emperors, Licinius and Maximin, watched each other on either side of the Bosphorus, with jealous and ill-dissembled hostility. Throughout the West, the Emperors were favourable, or at least not inimical, to Christianity. The political difficulties, even the vices of Maximin, enforced the policy of securing the support of a large and influential body; he placed himself at the head of the Pagan interest in the East. A deliberate scheme was laid for the advancement of one party in the popular favour, for the depression of the other. Measures were systematically taken to enfeeble the influence of Christianity, not by the authority of government, but by poisoning the public mind, and infusing into it a settled and conscientious animosity. False acts of Pilate were forged, intended to cast discredit on the divine founder of Christianity; they were disseminated with the utmost activity. The streets of Antioch and other Eastern cities were placarded with the most calumnious statements of the origin of the Christian faith. The instructors of youth were directed to introduce them as lessons into the schools, to make their pupils commit them to memory; and boys were heard repeating, or grown persons chanting, the most scandalous blasphemies against the object of Christian adoration.* In Damascus, the old arts of compelling or persuading

A. D. 311.

* In the speech attributed to S. Lucianus, previous to his martyrdom at Nicomedia, there is an allusion to these acts of Pilate, which shows that they had made considerable impression on the public mind. Routh, Reliquiæ Sacræ, iii. 286.

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women to confess that they had been present at the rites of the Christians, which had ended in lawless and promiscuous license, were renewed. The confession of some miserable prostitutes was submitted to the Emperor, published by his command, and disseminated throughout the Eastern cities, although the Christian rites had been long celebrated in those cities with the utmost publicity.*

Reorganisation of Paganism.

The second measure of Maximin was the reorganisation of the Pagan religion in all its original pomp, and more than its ancient power. A complete hierarchy was established on the model of the Christian episcopacy. Provincial pontiffs, men of the highest rank, were nominated; they were inaugurated with a solemn and splendid ceremonial, and were distinguished by a tunic of white. The Emperor himself assumed the appointment of the pontifical offices in the different towns, which had in general rested with the local authorities. Persons of rank and opulence were prevailed on to accept these sacred functions, and were thus committed by personal interest and corporate attachment, in the decisive struggle. Sacrifices were performed with the utmost splendour and regularity, and the pontiffs were invested with power to compel the attendance of all the citizens. The Christians were liable to every punishment or torture, short of death. The Pagan interest having thus become predominant in the greater cities, addresses were artfully suggested, and voted by the acclaiming multitude, imploring the interference of the Em-

* Euseb. viii. 14.

peror to expel these enemies of the established religion from their walls. The rescripts of the Emperor were engraved on brass, and suspended in the public parts of the city. The example was set by Antioch, once the head-quarters, and still, no doubt, a stronghold of Christianity. Theotecnus, the logistes or chamberlain of the city, took the lead. A splendid image was erected to Jupiter Philius, and dedicated with all the imposing pomp of mystery, perhaps of Eastern magic.* As though they would enlist that strong spirit of mutual attachment which bound the Christians together, the ancient Jupiter was invested in the most engaging and divine attribute of the God of Christianity —he was the God of Love. Nicomedia, the capital of the East, on the entrance of the Emperor, presented an address to the same effect as those which had been already offered by Antioch, Tyre, and other cities; and the Emperor affected to yield to this simultaneous expression of the general sentiment.

Persecutions in the dominions of Maximin.

The first overt act of hostility was a prohibition to the Christians to meet in their cemeteries, where probably their enthusiasm was wrought to the utmost height by the sacred thoughts associated with the graves of their martyrs. But the policy of Maximin, in general, confined itself to vexatious and harassing oppression, and to other punishments, which inflicted the pain and wretchedness without the dignity of dying for the faith: the persecuted had the sufferings, but not the glory of mar-

* Euseb. ix. 2, 3.

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tyrdom. Such, most likely, were the general orders of Maximin, though, in some places, the zeal of his officers may have transgressed the prescribed limits, it must not be said, of humanity. The Bishop and two inhabitants of Emesa, and Peter, the Patriarch of Alexandria, obtained the honours of death. Lucianus, the Bishop of Antioch, was sent to undergo a public examination at Nicomedia: he died in prison. The greater number of victims suffered the less merciful punishment of mutilation or excæcation. The remonstrances of Constantine were unavailing; the Emperor persisted in his cruel course; and is said to have condescended to an ingenious artifice to afflict the sensitive consciences of some persons of the higher orders, who escaped less painful penalties. His banquets were served with victims previously slain in sacrifice, and his Christian guests were thus unconsciously betrayed into a crime, which the authority of St. Paul had not yet convinced the more scrupulous believers to be a matter of perfect indifference.*

The Pagans appeal to the flourishing state of the East.

The Emperor, in his public rescript, in answer to the address from the city of Tyre, had, as it were, placed the issue of the contest on an appeal to Heaven. The gods of Paganism were asserted to be the benefactors of the human race; through their influence, the soil had yielded its annual increase; the genial air had not been parched by fatal droughts; the sea had neither been agitated with tempests nor swept by hurricanes; the earth,

* Euseb. ix. 7.

instead of being rocked by volcanic convulsions, had been the peaceful and fertile mother of its abundant fruits. Their own neighbourhood spoke the manifest favour of these benignant deities, in its rich fields, waving with harvests, its flowery and luxuriant meadows, and in the mild and genial temperature of the air. A city so blest by its tutelary gods, in prudence as well as in justice, would expel those traitorous citizens whose impiety endangered these blessings, and would wisely purify its walls from the infection of their heaven-despising presence.

Reverse.

But peace and prosperity by no means ensued upon the depression of the Christians. Notwithstanding the embellishment of the Heathen temples; A. D. 312. the restoration of the Polytheistic ceremonial in more than ordinary pomp; and the nomination of the noblest citizens to the pontifical offices, every kind of calamity,— tyranny, war, pestilence, and famine,— depopulated the Asiatic provinces. Not the least scourge of the Pagan East was the Pagan Emperor himself. Christian writers may have exaggerated, they can scarcely have invented, the vices of Maximin. His lusts violated alike the honour of noble and plebeian families. The eunuchs, the purveyors for his passions, traversed the provinces, marked out those who were distinguished by fatal beauty, and conducted these extraordinary perquisitions with the most insolent indignity: where milder measures would not prevail, force was used. Nor was tyranny content with the gratification of its own license: noble virgins, after having been dis-

Tyranny of Maximin.

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honoured by the Emperor, were granted in marriage to his slaves; even those of the highest rank were consigned to the embraces of a barbarian husband. Valeria, the widow of Galerius, and the daughter of Dioclesian, was first insulted by proposals of marriage from Maximin, whose wife was still living, and then forced to wander through the Eastern provinces in the humblest disguise, till, at length, she perished at Thessalonica by the still more unjustifiable sentence of Licinius.

War with Armenia.

The war of Maximin with Armenia was wantonly undertaken in a spirit of persecution. This earliest Christian kingdom was attached, in all the zeal of recent proselytism, to the new religion. That part which acknowledged the Roman sway was commanded to abandon Christianity; and the legions of Rome were employed in forcing the reluctant kingdom to obedience.*

Famine.

But these were foreign calamities. Throughout the dominions of Maximin the summer rains did not fall; a sudden famine desolated the whole East; corn rose to an unprecedented price.† Some large villages were entirely depopulated; many opulent families were reduced to beggary, and persons in a decent station sold their children as slaves. The rapacity of the Emperor aggravated the general misery. The granaries of individuals were seized, and their stores closed up by the imperial seal. The flocks and herds were driven away, to be offered in unavailing sacrifices to the

* Euseb. ix. 8.

† The statement in the text of Eusebius, as it stands, is utterly incredible,—a measure of wheat at 2500 attics (drachms), from 70*l.* to 80*l.*

gods. The court of the Emperor, in the meantime, insulted the general suffering by its excessive luxury; his foreign and barbarian troops lived in a kind of free quarters, in wasteful plenty, and plundered on all sides with perfect impunity. The scanty and unwholesome food produced its usual effect, a pestilential malady. Carbuncles broke out all over the bodies of those who were seized with the disorder, but particularly attacked the eyes, so that multitudes became helplessly and incurably blind. The houses of the wealthy, which were secure against the famine, seemed particularly marked out by the pestilence. The hearts of all classes were hardened by the extent of the calamity. The most opulent, despairing of diminishing the vast mass of misery, or of relieving the swarms of beggars who filled every town and city, gave up the fruitless endeavour. The Christians alone took a nobler and evangelic revenge upon their suffering enemies. They were active in allaying those miseries of which they were the common victims. The ecclesiastical historian claims no exemption for the Christians from the general calamity, but honourably boasts that they alone displayed the offices of humanity and brotherhood. They were every where, tending the living, and burying the dead. They distributed bread; they visited the infected houses; they scared away the dogs which preyed, in open day, on the bodies in the streets, and rendered to them the decent honours of burial. The myriads who perished, and were perishing, in a state of absolute desertion, could not but acknowledge

Pestilence.

BOOK II.

that Christianity was stronger than love of kindred. The fears and the gratitude of mankind were equally awakened in their favour; the fears which could not but conclude these calamities to be the vengeance of Heaven for the persecutions of its favoured people; the gratitude to those who thus repaid good for evil in the midst of a hostile and exasperated society.*

Before we turn our attention to the West, and follow the triumphant career of Constantine to the reconsolidation of the empire in his person, and the triumph of Christianity through his favour, it may be more consistent with the distinct view of these proceedings, to violate in some degree the order of time, and follow to its close the history of the Christian persecutions in the East.

Maximin retracts his persecuting edict.

Maximin took the alarm, and endeavoured, too late, to retrace his steps. He issued an edict, in which he avowed the plain principles of toleration, and ascribed his departure from that salutary policy to the importunate zeal of his capital and of other cities, which he could not treat with disrespect, but which had demanded the expulsion of the Christians from their respective territories. He commanded the suspension of all violent measures, and recommended only mild and persuasive means to win back these apostates to the religion of their forefathers. The Christians, who had once been deluded by a show of mercy, feared to reconstruct their fallen edifices, or to renew their public assem-

* Euseb. ix. 9.

blies; and awaited, in trembling expectation, the issue of the approaching contest with Licinius.*

The victory of Constantine over Maxentius had left him master of Rome. Constantine and Licinius reigned over all the European provinces; and the public edict for the toleration of Christianity, issued in the name of these two Emperors, announced the policy of the Western empire.

After the defeat of Maximin by Licinius, his obscure death gave ample scope for the credulous, if not inventive malice of his enemies, to ascribe to his last moments every excess of weakness and cruelty, as well as of suffering. He is said to have revenged his baffled hopes of victory on the Pagan priesthood, who incited him to the war, by a promiscuous massacre of all within his power. His last imperial act was the promulgation of another edict†, still more explicitly favourable to the Christians, in which he not merely proclaimed an unrestricted liberty of conscience, but restored the confiscated property of their churches. His bodily sufferings completed the dark catalogue of persecuting Emperors who had perished under the most excruciating torments: his body was slowly consumed by an internal fire.‡

A. D. 313.

Death of Maximin.

With Maximin expired the last hope of Paganism to maintain itself by the authority of the government. Though Licinius was only accidentally connected with the Christian party, and afterwards allied himself for a short time to the Pagan

The new Paganism falls with Maximin.

* Euseb. viii. 14.
† Edict of toleration issued from Nicomedia, A. D. 313, 13th June.
‡ Euseb. ix. 9.

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interest, at this juncture his enemies were those of Christianity; and his cruel triumph annihilated at once the adherents of Maximin, and those of the old religion. The new hierarchy fell at once; the chief magistrates of almost all the cities were executed; for even where they were not invested in the pontifical offices, it was under their authority that Paganism had renewed its more imposing form, and sank with them into the common ruin. The arts by which Theotecnus, of Antioch, the chief adviser of Maximin, had imposed upon the populace of that city by mysterious wonders, were detected and exposed to public contempt, and the author put to death. Tyre, which had recommended itself to Maximin by the most violent hostility to the Christian name, was constrained to witness the reconstruction of the fallen church in far more than its original grandeur. Eusebius, afterwards the Bishop of Cæsarea, and the historian of the Church, pronounced an inaugural discourse on its reconsecration. His description of the building is curious in itself, as the model of an Eastern church, and illustrates the power and opulence of the Christian party in a city which had taken the lead on the side of Paganism. Nor would the Christian orator venture greatly to exaggerate the splendour of a building which stood in the midst, and provoked, as it were, a comparison with temples of high antiquity, and unquestioned magnificence.

Rebuilding of the church of Tyre.

The Christian church was built on the old site; for, though a more convenient and imposing

space might have been found, the piety of the Christians clung with reverence to a spot consecrated by the most holy associations; and their pride, perhaps, was gratified in restoring to more than its former grandeur the edifice which had been destroyed by Pagan malice. The whole site was environed with a wall; a lofty propylæon, which faced the rising sun, commanded the attention of the passing Pagan, who could not but contrast the present splendour with the recent solitude of the place; and afforded an imposing glimpse of the magnificence within. The intermediate space between the propylæon and the church, was laid out in a cloister with four colonnades, enclosed with a palisade of wood. The centre square was open to the sun and air, and two fountains sparkled in the midst, and reminded the worshipper, with their emblematic purity, of the necessity of sanctification. The uninitiate proceeded no farther than the cloister, but might behold at this modest distance the mysteries of the sanctuary. Several other vestibules, or propylæa, intervened between the cloister and the main building. The three gates of the church fronted the East, of which the central was the loftiest and most costly, "like a queen between her attendants." It was adorned with plates of brass and richly sculptured reliefs. Two colonnades, or aisles, ran along the main building, above which were windows, which lighted the edifice; other buildings for the use of the ministers adjoined. Unfortunately, the pompous eloquence of Eusebius would not condescend to the vulgar details of mea-

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surements, and dwells only in vague terms of wonder at the spaciousness, the heaven-soaring loftiness, the splendour of the interior. The roof was of beams from the cedars of Lebanon, the floor inlaid with marble. In the centre rose the altar which had already obtained the name of the place of sacrifice; it was guarded from the approach of the profane by a trellis of the most slender and graceful workmanship. Lofty seats were prepared for the higher orders, and benches for those of lower rank were arranged with regularity throughout the building. Tyre, no doubt, did not stand alone in this splendid restoration of her Christian worship; and Christianity, even before its final triumph, under Constantine, before the restoration of their endowments, and the munificent imperial gifts, possessed sufficient wealth at least to commence these costly undertakings.

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

CONSTANTINE.

Reign of Constantine.

THE reign of Constantine the Great forms one of the epochs in the history of the world. It is the æra of the dissolution of the Roman Empire; the commencement, or rather consolidation, of a kind of Eastern despotism, with a new capital, a new patriciate, a new constitution, a new financial system, a new, though as yet imperfect, jurisprudence, and, finally, a new religion. Already, in the time of Dioclesian, Italy had sunk into a province; Rome into *one* of the great cities of the empire. The declension of her importance had been gradual, but inevitable; her supremacy had been shaken by that slow succession of changes which had imperceptibly raised the relative weight and dignity of other parts of the empire, and of the empire itself, as a whole, until she ceased to be the central point of the administration of public affairs. Rome was no longer the heart of the social system, from which emanated all the life and power which animated and regulated the vast and unwieldy body, and to which flowed in the wealth and the homage of the obedient world.

Change in the empire.

Degradation of Rome.

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The admission of the whole empire to the rights of Roman citizenship by Caracalla had dissolved the commanding spell which centuries of glory and conquest had attached to the majesty of the Roman name. To be a Roman was no longer a privilege; it gave no distinctive rights, its exemptions were either taken away, or vulgarised by being made common to all except the servile order. The secret once betrayed that the imperial dignity might be conferred elsewhere than in the imperial city, lowered still more the pre-eminence of Rome. From that time, the seat of government was at the head of the army. If the Emperor, proclaimed in Syria, in Illyria, or in Britain, condescended, without much delay, to visit the ancient capital, the trembling senate had but to ratify the decree of the army, and the Roman people to welcome, with submissive acclamations, their new master.

Dioclesian had consummated the degradation of Rome, by transferring the residence of the court to Nicomedia. He had commenced the work of reconstructing the empire upon a new basis; some of his measures were vigorous, comprehensive, and tending to the strength and consolidation of the social edifice; but he had introduced a principle of disunion, more than powerful enough to counteract all the energy which he had infused into the executive government. His fatal policy of appointing co-ordinate sovereigns, two Augusti, with powers avowedly equal, and two Cæsars, with authority nominally subordinate, but which, in able

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Unity of the empire still preserved.

hands, would not long have brooked inferiority, had nearly dismembered the solid unity of the empire. As yet, the influence of the Roman name was commanding and awful; the provinces were accustomed to consider themselves as parts of one political confederacy; the armies marched still under the same banners, were united by discipline, and as yet by the unforgotten inheritance of victory from their all-subduing ancestors. In all parts of the world, every vestige of civil independence had long been effaced; centuries of servitude had destroyed every dangerous memorial of ancient dynasties or republican constitutions. Hence, therefore, the more moderate ambition of erecting an independent kingdom, never occurred to any of the rival Emperors; or, if the separation had been attempted; if a man of ability had endeavoured to partition off one great province, dependent upon its own resources, defended by its own legions, or, on a well organised force of auxiliary barbarians; the age was not yet ripe for such a daring innovation. The whole empire would have resented the secession of any member from the ancient confederacy, and turned its concentrated force against the recreant apostate from the majestic unity of imperial Rome. Yet, if this system had long prevailed, the disorganising must have finally triumphed over the associating principle: separate interests would have arisen; a gradual departure from the uniform order of administration have taken place; a national character might have developed itself in different quarters; and the vast

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and harmonious edifice would have split asunder into distinct, and insulated, and at length hostile, kingdoms.

Nothing less than a sovereign, whose comprehensive mind could discern the exigencies of this critical period; nothing less than a conqueror, who rested on the strength of successive victories over his competitors for the supremacy, could have reunited, and in time, under one vigorous administration, the dissolving elements of the empire.

Such a conqueror was Constantine: but, reunited, the empire imperiously demanded a complete civil reorganisation. It was not the foundation of the new capital which wrought the change in the state of the empire, it was the state of the empire which required a new capital. The ancient system of government, emanating entirely from Rome, and preserving, with sacred reverence, the old republican forms, had lost its awe; the world acknowledged the master wherever it felt the power. The possession of Rome added no great weight to the candidate for empire, while its pretensions embarrassed the ruling sovereign.* The powerless senate, which still expected to ratify the imperial decrees; the patrician order, which had ceased to occupy the posts of honour, and danger, and distinction; the turbulent populace, and the prætorian soldiery, who still presumed to as-

* Galerius (if we are to trust the hostile author of the de Mort. Persecut.) had never seen Rome before his invasion of Italy, and was unacquainted with its immense magnitude. Galerius, according to the same authority, threatened, after his flight from Italy, to change the name of the empire, from Roman to Dacian — (c. xxvii.).

sert their superiority over the legions who were bravely contesting the German or the Persian frontier; the forms, the intrigues, the interests, the factions of such a city, would not be permitted by an Emperor accustomed to rule with absolute dominion in Treves, in Milan, or in Nicomedia, to clog the free movements of his administration. The dissolution of the prætorian bands by Constantine, on his victory over Maxentius, though necessary to the peace, was fatal to the power, of Rome. It cut off one of her great though dearly-purchased distinctions. Around the Asiatic, or the Illyrian, or the Gaulish court, had gradually arisen a new nobility, if not yet distinguished by title, yet, by service or by favour, possessing the marked and acknowledged confidence of the Emperor, and filling all offices of power and of dignity — a nobility independent of patrician descent, or the tenure of property in Italy. Ability in the field or in the council, or even court intrigue, would triumph over the claims of hereditary descent; and all that remained was to decorate with title, and organise into a new aristocracy, those who already possessed the influence and the authority of rank. With Emperors of provincial or barbarous descent naturally arose a race of military or civil servants, strangers to Roman blood, and to the Roman name. The will of the sovereign became the fountain of honour. New regulations of finance, and a jurisprudence, though adhering closely to the forms and the practice of the old institutions, new in its spirit and in the scope of many of its provisions,

New nobility.

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embraced the whole empire in its comprehensive sphere. It was no longer Rome which legislated for the world, but the legislation which comprehended Rome among the cities subject to its authority. The laws were neither issued nor ratified, they were only submitted to, by Rome.

State of the religion of Rome.

The Roman religion sank with the Roman supremacy. The new empire welcomed the new religion as its ally and associate in the government of the human mind. The empire lent its countenance, its sanction, at length its power, to Christianity; Christianity infused throughout the empire a secret principle of association, which, long after it had dissolved into separate and conflicting masses, held together, nevertheless, the loose and crumbling confederacy, and, at length, itself assuming the lost or abdicated sovereignty, compressed the whole into one system under a spiritual dominion. The papal, after some interval of confusion and disorganisation, succeeded the imperial autocracy over the European world.

Motives for the conversion of Constantine.

Of all historical problems, none has been discussed with a stronger bias of opinion, of passion, and of prejudice, according to the age, the nation, the creed, of the writer, than the conversion of Constantine, and the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire. Hypocrisy, policy, superstition, divine inspiration, have been in turn assigned as the sole or the predominant influence which, operating on the mind of the Emperor, decided at once the religious destiny of the empire. But there is nothing improbable in supposing that

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Constantine was actuated by concurrent, or even conflicting, motives; all of which united in enforcing the triumph of Christianity. There is nothing contradictory in the combination of the motives themselves, particularly if we consider them as operating with greater strength, or with successive paroxysms, as it were, of influence, during the different periods in the life of Constantine, on the soldier, the statesman, and the man. The soldier, at a perilous crisis, might appeal, without just notions of his nature, to the tutelary power of a deity to whom a considerable part of his subjects, and perhaps of his army, looked up with faith or with awe. The statesman may have seen the absolute necessity of basing his new constitution on religion; he may have chosen Christianity as obviously possessing the strongest, and still strengthening, hold upon the minds of his people. He might appreciate, with profound political sagacity, the moral influence of Christianity, as well as its tendency to enforce peaceful, if not passive, obedience to civil government. At a later period, particularly if the circumstances of his life threw him more into connection with the Christian priesthood, he might gradually adopt as a religion that which had commanded his admiration as a political influence. He might embrace, with ardent attachment, yet, after all, by no means with distinct apprehension, or implicit obedience to all its ordinances, that faith which alone seemed to survive amid the wreck of all other religious systems.

A rapid but comprehensive survey of the state

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of Christianity at this momentous period will explain the position in which it stood in relation to the civil government, to the general population of the empire, and to the ancient religion; and throw a clear and steady light upon the manner in which it obtained its political as well as its spiritual dominion over the Roman world.

Revival of Zoroastrianism.

The third century of Christianity had been prolific in religious revolutions. In the East, the silent progress of the Gospel had been suddenly arrested; Christianity had been thrown back with irresistible violence on the Roman territory. An ancient religion, connected with the great political changes in the sovereignty of the Persian kingdom, revived in all the vigour and enthusiasm of a new creed; it was received as the associate and main support of the state. An hierarchy, numerous, powerful, and opulent, with all the union and stability of an hereditary caste, strengthened by large landed possessions, was reinvested in an authority almost co-ordinate with that of the sovereign. The restoration of Zoroastrianism, as the established and influential religion of Persia, is perhaps the only instance of the vigorous revival of a Pagan religion.* Of the native religion of the Parthians, little, if any thing, is known. They were a Scythian race,

* The materials for this view of the restoration of the Persian religion are chiefly derived from the following sources:—Hyde, de Religione Persarum; Auquetil du Perron; Zendavesta, 3 vols.; the German translation of Du Perron, by Kleuker, with the very valuable volumes of appendix (Anhang); De Guigniaut's Translation of Creuzers Symbolik; Malcolm's History of Persia; Heeren, Ideen.

Some of these sources were not open to Gibbon when he composed his brilliant chapter on this subject.

who overran and formed a ruling aristocracy over the remains of the older Persian, and the more modern Grecian civilisation. The Scythian, or Tartar or Turcoman tribes, who have perpetually, from China westward, invaded and subdued the more polished nations, have never attempted to force their rude and shapeless deities, their more vulgar Shamanism, or even the Buddhism, which in its simpler form has prevailed among them to a great extent, on the nations over which they have ruled. The ancient Magian priesthood remained, if with diminished power, in great numbers, and not without extensive possessions in the eastern provinces of the Parthian empire. The temples raised by the Greek successors of Alexander, whether to Grecian deities, or blended with the Tsabaism or the Nature-worship of Babylonia or Syria, continued to possess their undiminished honours, with their ample endowments and their sacerdotal colleges. Some vestiges of the deification of the kings of the line of Arsaces seem to be discerned, but with doubtful certainty.

The earliest legendary history of Christianity assigns Parthia as the scene of Apostolic labours; it was the province of St. Thomas. But in the intermediate region, the great Babylonian province, there is the strongest evidence that Christianity had made an early, a rapid, and a successful progress. It was the residence, at least for a certain period, of the Apostle St. Peter.* With what suc-

* Compare note to Vol. I. p. 63

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cess it conducted its contest with Judaism, it is impossible to conjecture; for Judaism, which, after the second rebellion in the reign of Hadrian, maintained but a permissive and precarious existence in Palestine, flourished in the Babylonian province, with something of a national and independent character. The Resch-Glutha, or Prince of the Captivity, far surpassed in the splendour of his court the patriarch of Tiberias; and the activity of their schools of learning, in Nahardea, in Sura, and in Pumbeditha, is attested by the vast compilation of the Babylonian Talmud.* Nor does the Christianity of this region appear to have suffered from the persecuting spirit of the Magian hierarchy during the earlier conflicts for the Mesopotamian provinces, between the arms of Rome and Persia. Though one bishop ruled the united communities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, the numbers of Christians in the rest of the province were probably far from inconsiderable.

Restoration of Persian monarchy by Ardeschir Babhegan.

Of the religion of Zoroaster.

It was in the ancient dominions of Darius and of Xerxes that the old religion of Zoroaster reassumed its power and authority. No sooner had Ardeschir Babhegan (the Artaxerxes of the Greeks) destroyed the last remains of the foreign Parthian dynasty, and reorganised the dominion of the native Persian kings, from the borders of Charismia to the Tigris (the Persian writers assert to the Euphrates)†, than he hastened to environ his throne with the Magian hierarchy, and to re-establish the

* See History of the Jews, iii. 173. &c.

† Malcolm's History of Persia, i. 72.

sacerdotal order in all its former dignity. But an ancient religion, which has sunk into obscurity, will not regain its full influence over the popular mind, unless reinvested in divine authority: intercourse with heaven must be renewed; the sanction and ratification of the deity must be public and acknowledged. Wonder and miracle are as necessary to the revival of an old, as to the establishment of a new religion. In the records of the Zoroastrian faith, which are preserved in the ancient language of the Zend, may be traced many singular provisions which bear the mark of great antiquity, and show the transition from a pastoral to an agricultural life.* The cultivation of the soil; the propagation of fruit-trees, nowhere so luxuriant and various as in the districts which probably gave birth to the great religious legislator of the East, Balk, and the country of the modern Afghans; and the destruction of noxious animals, are among the primary obligations enforced on the followers of Zoroaster. A grateful people might look back with the deepest veneration on the author of a religious code so wisely beneficent; the tenth of the produce would be no disproportioned offering to the priesthood of a religion which had thus turned civilisation into a duty, and given a divine sanction to the first principles of human wealth and happiness. But a new impulse was necessary to a people which had long passed this state of transition, and were only reas-

* Compare Heeren, Ideen, and Rhode, die Heilige Sage des Zendvolks.

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suming the possessions of their ancestors, and reconstructing their famous monarchy. Zoroastrianism, like all other religions, had split into numerous sects; and an authoritative exposition of the Living Word of Zoroaster could alone restore its power and its harmony to the re-established Magianism of the realm of Ardeschir. Erdiviraph was the Magian, designated by his blameless innocence from his mother's womb, to renew the intercourse with the Divinity, and to unfold, on the authority of inspiration, the secrets of heaven and hell. Forty (according to one account, eighty thousand) of the Magian priesthood; the Archimage, who resided in Bactria, the Desturs and the Mobeds, had assembled to witness and sanction the important ceremony. They were successively reduced to 40,000, to 4000, to 400, to 40, to 7: the acknowledged merit of Erdiviraph gave him the pre-eminence among the seven.* Having passed through the strictest ablutions, and drunk a powerful opiate, he was covered with a white linen, and laid to sleep. Watched by seven of the nobles, including the king, he slept for seven days and nights; and, on his reawakening, the whole nation listened with believing wonder to his exposition of the faith of Oromazd, which was carefully written down by an attendant scribe, for the benefit of posterity.†

Vision of Erdiviraph.

* All these numbers, it should be observed, are multiples of 40, the indefinite number throughout the East. (See Bredow's Dissertation, annexed to the new edition of Syncellus; Byzant. Hist. Bonn.) The recusants of Zoroastrianism (vid. infra) are in like manner reduced to seven, the sacred number with the Zoroastrian, as with the religion of the Old Testament.

† Hyde (from Persian authorities) de Relig. Pers. p. 278. et seqq.

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Intolerance of the Magian hierarchy.

An hierarchy which suddenly regains its power, after centuries of obscurity, perhaps of oppression, will not be scrupulous as to the means of giving strength and permanence to its dominion. With Ardeschir, the restoration of the Persian people to their rank among the nations of the earth, by the re-infusion of a national spirit, was the noble object of ambition; the re-establishment of a national religion, as the strongest and most enduring bond of union, was an essential part of his great scheme; but a national religion, thus associated with the civil polity, is necessarily exclusive, and impatient of the rivalry of other creeds. Intolerance lies in the very nature of a religion which, dividing the whole world into the realm of two conflicting principles, raises one part of mankind into a privileged order, as followers of the good principle, and condemns the other half as the irreclaimable slaves of the evil one. The national worship is identified with that of Oromazd; and the kingdom of Oromazd must be purified from the intrusion of the followers of Ahriman. The foreign relations, so to speak, of the Persian monarchy, according to their old poetical history, are strongly coloured by their deep-rooted religious opinions. Their implacable enemies, the pastoral Tartar or Turcoman tribes, inhabit the realm of darkness, and invade at times and desolate the kingdom of light, till some mighty monarch, Kaiomers, or some redoubtable hero, Rustan, reasserts the majesty, and revenges the losses, of the kingdom of Oromazd. Iran and Turan are the representatives of the two conflicting worlds

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of light and darkness. In the same spirit, to expel, to persecute, the followers of other religions, was to expel, to trample on, the followers of Ahriman. This edict of Ardeschir closed all the temples but those of the fire-worshippers, — only eighty thousand followers of Ahriman, including the worshippers of foreign religions, and the less orthodox believers in Zoroastrianism, remained to infect the purified region of Oromazd.* Of the loss sustained by Christianity during this conflict, in the proper dominions of Persia, and the number of churches which shared the fate of the Parthian and Grecian temples, there is no record. The persecutions by the followers of Zoroaster are only to be traced, at a later period, in Armenia, and in the Babylonian province; but Persia, from this time, until the fiercer persecutions of their own brethren forced the Nestorian Christians to overleap every obstacle, presented a stern and insuperable barrier to the progress of Christianity.† It cut off all connection with the Christian communities (if communities there were) in the remoter East.‡

Destruction of Christianity in Persia.

* Gibbon, in his chapter on the restoration of the Persian monarchy and religion, has said that in this conflict "the sword of Aristotle (such was the name given by the Orientals to the Polytheism and philosophy of the Greeks) was easily broken." I suspect this expression to be an anachronism; it is clearly post-Mahometan and from a Mahometan author. He has likewise quoted authorities for the persecution of Artaxerxes, which relate to those of his descendants.

† Sozomen, indeed, asserts that Christianity was first introduced into the Persian dominions at a later period, from their intercourse with Osroene and Armenia. But it is very improbable that the active zeal of the Christians in the first ages of the religion should not have taken advantage of the mild and tolerant government of the Parthian kings. "Parthians and Elamites," i. e. Jews inhabiting those countries, are mentioned as among the converts on the day of Pentecost. Sozomen, ii. 8.

‡ The date of the earliest

CHAP. I.

Connection of the throne and the hierarchy.

Ardeschir bequeathed to his royal descendants the solemn charge of maintaining the indissoluble union of the Magian religion with the state. "Never forget that, as a king, you are at once the protector of religion and of your country. Consider the altar and the throne as inseparable; they must always sustain each other. A sovereign without religion is a tyrant; and a people who have none, may be deemed the most monstrous of societies. Religion may exist without a state, but a state cannot exist without religion: it is by holy laws that a political association can alone be bound. You should be to your people an example of piety and virtue, but without pride or ostentation." * The kings of the race of Sassan accepted and fulfilled the sacred trust; the Magian hierarchy encircled and supported the kingly power of Persia. They formed the great council of the state. Foreign religions, if tolerated, were watched with jealous severity; Magianism was established at the point of the sword, in those parts of Armenia, which were subjugated by the Persian kings. When Mesopotamia was included within the pale of the Persian dominions, the Jews were, at times, exposed to the severest oppressions; the burial of the dead was peculiarly offensive to the usages of the fire-worshippers. Mani was alike rejected, and persecuted by the Christian and the Magian priesthood; and the barbarous execution of the Christian bishops, who ruled over

Christian communities in India is judiciously discussed in Bohlen, das alte Indien, i. 369. to the end.

* Malcolm's Hist. of Persia, i. 74., from Ferdusi.

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the Babylonian sees, demanded at a later period the interference of Constantine.*

Armenia the first Christian kingdom.

But while Persia thus fiercely repelled Christianity from its frontier, upon that frontier arose a Christian state.† Armenia was the first country which embraced Christianity as the religion of the king, the nobles, and the people. During the early ages of the empire, Armenia had been an object of open contention, or of political intrigue, between the conflicting powers of Parthia and Rome. The adoption of Christianity as the religion of the state, while it united the interests of the kingdom, by a closer bond, with the Christian empire of Rome (for it anticipated the honour of being the first Christian state by only a few years), added, to its perilous situation on the borders of the two empires, a new cause for the implacable hostility of Persia. Every successful invasion, and every subtle negociation to establish the Persian predominance in Armenia, was marked by the most relentless and sanguinary persecutions, which were endured with the combined dignity of Christian and patriotic heroism by the afflicted people. The Vartobed, or patriarch, was always the first victim of Persian conquest, the first leader to raise the fallen standard of independence.

The Armenian histories, written, almost without exception, by the priesthood, in order to do honour

* Sozomen, ii. 9, 10. Compare, on these persecutions of the Christians, Kleuker, Anhang zum Zendavesta, p. 292. et seq., with Assemanni, Act. Martyr. Or. et Occid. Romæ, 1748.

† St. Martin, Mémoires sur l'Arménie, i. 405, 406, &c. Notes to Le Beau., Hist. des Empereurs, i. 76.

to their native country by its early reception of Christianity, have included the Syrian kingdom of Edessa within its borders, and assigned a place to the celebrated Abgar in the line of their kings. The personal correspondence of Abgar with the divine author of Christianity is, of course, incorporated in this early legend. But though, no doubt, Christianity had made considerable progress, at the commencement of the third century, the government of Armenia was still sternly and irreconcilably Pagan. Khosrov I. imitated the cruel and impious Pharaoh. He compelled the Christians, on a scanty stipend, to labour on the public works. Many obtained the glorious crown of martyrdom.* CHAP. I. A. D. 214.

Gregory the Illuminator was the Apostle of Armenia. The birth of Gregory was darkly connected with the murder of the reigning king, the almost total extirpation of the royal race, and the subjugation of his country to a foreign yoke. He was the son of Anah, the assassin of his sovereign. The murder of Khosrov, the valiant and powerful king of Armenia, is attributed to the jealous ambition of Ardeschir, the first King of Persia.† Anah, of a noble Armenian race, was bribed by the promise of vast wealth and the second place in the empire, to conspire against the life of Khosrov. Pretending to take refuge in the Armenian dominions from the persecution of King Ardeschir, he was hospitably received in the city of Valarshapat. Gregory the Illuminator.

* Father Chamich, History of Armenia, i. 153., translated by Avdall.

† Moses Choren, 64. 71. Chamich, Hist. Armén. i. 154., and other authorities. St. Martin, Mémoires sur l'Arménie, i. 303. &c.

BOOK III.

Murder of Khosrov.

He struck the King to the heart, and fled. The Armenian soldiery, in their fury, pursued the assassin, who was drowned, during his flight, in the river Araxes. The vengeance of the soldiers wreaked itself upon his innocent family*; the infant Gregory was alone saved by a Christian nurse, who took refuge in Cæsarea. There the future Apostle was baptized, and (thus runs the legend) by divine revelation received the name of Gregory. Ardeschir reaped all the advantage of the treachery of Anah, and Armenia sank into a Persian province. The conqueror consummated the crime of his base instrument; the whole family of Khosrov was put to death, except Tiridates, who fled to the Roman dominions, and one sister, Khosrovedught, who was afterwards instrumental in the introduction of Christianity into the kingdom. Tiridates served with distinction in the Roman armies of Dioclesian, and seized the favourable opportunity of reconquering his hereditary throne. The re-establishment of Armenia as a friendly power was an important event in the Eastern policy of Rome; the simultaneous conversion of the empire and its Eastern ally to the new religion strengthened the bonds of union by a common religious interest.

Tiridates, King of Armenia.

Gregory re-entered his native country in the train of the victorious Tiridates. But Tiridates was a bigoted adherent to the ancient religion of his country. This religion appears to have been a mingled form of corrupt Zoroastrianism and Grecian

* According to St. Martin, two children of Anah were saved.

or rather Oriental, nature-worship, with some rites of Scythian origin. Their chief deity was Aramazt, the Ormuzd of the Magian system, but their temples were crowded with statues, and their altars reeked with animal sacrifices; usages revolting to the purer Magianism of Persia.* The Babylonian impersonation of the female principle of generation, Anaitis or Anahid, was one of their most celebrated divinities; and at the funeral of their great King Artaces, many persons had immolated themselves, after the Scythian or Getic custom, upon his body.

It was in the temple of Anaitis, in the province of Ekelias, that Tiridates offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving for his restoration to his hereditary throne. He commanded Gregory to assist in the idolatrous worship. The Christian resolutely refused, and endured, according to the Armenian history, twelve different kinds of torture. It was disclosed to the exasperated monarch, that the apostate from the national religion was son to the assassin of his father. Gregory was plunged into a deep dungeon, where he languished for fourteen years, supported by the faithful charity of a Christian female. At the close of the fourteen years, a pestilence, attributed by the Christian party to the divine vengeance, wasted the kingdom of Armenia. The virgin sister of Tiridates, Khosrovedught (the daughter of Khosrov) had embraced the faith of the Gospel. By divine revelation (thus speaks the piety of the priestly historians), she advised the im-

Persecution of Gregory.

* Chamich, i. 145.

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mediate release of Gregory. What Heaven had commanded, Heaven had approved by wonders. The King himself, afflicted with the malady, was healed by the Christian missionary. The pestilence ceased; the king, the nobles, the people, almost simultaneously submitted to baptism. Armenia became at once a Christian kingdom. Gregory took the highest rank, as Archbishop of the kingdom. Priests were invited from Greece and Syria; four hundred bishops were consecrated; churches and religious houses arose in every quarter; the Christian festivals and days of religious observance were established by law.

Conversion of the King.

But the severe truth of history must make the melancholy acknowledgment that the Gospel did not finally triumph without a fierce and sanguinary strife. The province of Dara, the sacred region of the Armenians, crowded with their national temples, made a stern and determined resistance. The priests fought for their altars with desperate courage, and it was only with the sword that churches could be planted in that irreclaimable district. In the war waged by Maximin against Tiridates, in which the ultimate aim of the Roman Emperor, according to Eusebius, was the suppression of Christianity, he may have been invited and encouraged by the rebellious Paganism of the subjects of Tiridates.

Persecution by the Christians.

Towards the close of the third century, while the religion of the East was undergoing these signal revolutions, and the antagonist creeds of Magianism and Christianity were growing up into

Manicheism.

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powerful and hostile systems, and assuming an important influence on the political affairs of Asia; while the East and the West thus began that strife of centuries which subsequently continued in a more fierce and implacable form in the conflict between Christianity and Mahometanism; a bold and ambitious adventurer in the career of religious change * attempted to unite the conflicting elements; to reconcile the hostile genius of the East and of the West; to fuse together, in one comprehensive scheme, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and apparently the Buddhism of India. It is singular to trace the doctrines of the most opposite systems, and of remote regions, assembled together and harmonised in the vast Eclecticism of Mani.† From his native Persia he derived his Dualism, his antagonist worlds of light and darkness; and from Magianism, likewise, his contempt of outward temple and splendid ceremonial. From Gnosticism, or rather from universal Orientalism, he drew the

Mani.

Various sources of his doctrines.

* Besides the original authorities, I have consulted for Mani and his doctrines, Beausobre, Hist. du Manicheisme; D'Herbelot, art. Mani; Lardner, Credibility of Gospel History; Mosheim, de Reb. Christ. ante Const. Magnum; Matter, Hist. du Gnosticime, ii. 351. I have only seen Baur's Manichaische Religions System, since this chapter was written. I had anticipated, though not followed out so closely, the relationship to Budhism, much of which, however, is evidently the common groundwork of all Orientalism.

† Augustine, in various passages, but most fully in what is given as an extract from the book of the Foundation, de Nat. Boni, p. 515. Compare Beausobre, vol. ii. 386., who seems to consider it an abstract from some forged or spurious work. Probably much of Mani's system was allegorical, but how much his disciples probably did not, and his adversaries would not, know. See also the most curious passage about the Manichean metempsychosis, in the statement of Tyrbo, in the Disputatio Archelai et Manetis, apud Routh, Reliquiæ Sacræ, vol. iv.

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inseparable admixture of physical and moral notions, the eternal hostility between mind and matter, the rejection of Judaism, and the identification of the God of the Old Testament with the evil spirit, the distinction between Jesus and the Christ, with the docetism, or the unreal death of the incorporeal Christ. From Cabalism, through Gnosticism, came the primal man, the Adam Cædmon of that system, and (if that be a genuine part of this system) the assumption of beautiful human forms, those of graceful boys and attractive virgins, by the powers of light, and their union with the male and female spirits of darkness. From India, he took the Emanation theory (all light was a part of the Deity, and in one sense the soul of the world), the metempsychosis, the triple division of human souls. (the one the pure, which reascended at once, and was reunited to the primal light; the second the semi-pure, which having passed through a purgatorial process, returned to earth, to pass through a second ordeal of life; the third, of obstinate and irreclaimable evil): from India, perhaps, came his Homophorus, as the Greeks called it, his Atlas, who supported the earth upon his shoulders, and his Splenditenens, the circumambient air. From Chaldea, he borrowed the power of astral influences; and he approximated to the solar worship of expiring Paganism: Christ, the Mediator, like the Mithra of his countrymen, had his dwelling in the sun.*

From his native country Mani derived the sim-

* D'Herbelot, voc. Mani.

ple diet of fruits and herbs; from the Buddhism of India, his respect for animal life, which was neither to be slain for food or for sacrifice*; from all the anti-materialist sects or religions, the abhorrence of all sensual indulgence, even the bath as well as the banquet; the proscription, or, at least, the disparagement of marriage. And the whole of these foreign and extraneous tenets, his creative imagination blended with his own form of Christianity; for, so completely are they mingled, that it is difficult to decide whether Christianity or Magianism formed the groundwork of his system. From Christianity he derived not, perhaps, a strictly Nicene, but more than an Arian, Trinity. His own system was the completion of the imperfect revelation of the Gospel. He was a *man* invested with a divine mission,—the Paraclete (for Mani appears to have distinguished between the Paraclete and the Holy Spirit), who was to consummate the great work auspiciously commenced, yet unfulfilled, by the mission of Jesus.† Mani had

* D'Herbelot, voc. Mani. Augustine says that they wept when they plucked vegetables for food, for in them also there was a certain portion of life, which, according to him, was a part of the Deity. Dicitis enim dolorem sentire fructum, cum de arbore carpitur, sentire dum conciditur, cum teritur, cum coquitur, cum manditur. Cujus, porro dementiæ est, pios se videri velle, quod ab animalium interfectione se temperent, cum omnes suas escas easdem animas habere dicunt, quibus ut putant, viventibus, tanta vulnera et manibus et dentibus ingerant. Augustin. contra Faust., lib. vi. p. 205, 206. This is pure Buddhism.

† Lardner, following Beausobre, considers the account of Mani's predecessors, Scythianus and Terebinthus, or Buddha, idle fictions. The virgin birth assigned to Buddha, which appears to harmonise with the great Indian Mythos of the origin of Buddhism, might warrant a conjecture that this is an Oriental tradition of the Indian origin of some of Mani's doctrines, dictated by Greek ignorance. I now find this conjecture followed out and illustrated with copious learning by Baur.

BOOK III.

twelve apostles. His Ertang, or Gospel, was intended to supersede the four Christian Evangelists, whose works, though valuable, he averred had been interpolated with many Jewish fables. The Acts, Mani altogether rejected, as announcing the descent of the Paraclete on the Apostles.* On the writings of St. Paul, he pronounced a more favourable sentence. But his Ertang, it is said, was not merely the work of a prophet, but of a painter; for, among his various accomplishments, Mani excelled in that art. It was richly illustrated by paintings, which commanded the wonder of the age; while his followers, in devout admiration, studied the tenets of their master in the splendid images, as well as in the sublime language, of the Marvellous Book. If this be true, since the speculative character of Mani's chief tenets, their theogonical, if it may be so said, extramundane character, lay beyond the proper province of the painter (the imitation of existing beings, and that idealism which, though elevating its objects to an unreal dignity or beauty, is nevertheless faithful to the truth of nature) this imagery, with which his book was illuminated, was probably a rich system of Oriental symbolism, which may have been transmuted by the blind zeal of his followers, or the misapprehension of his adversaries, into some of his more fanciful tenets. The religion of Persia was fertile in these emblematic figures, if not their native source; and in the gorgeous illuminated manuscripts of the East, often full of allegorical devices, we may dis-

His paintings.

* Lardner (v. 11. 183.) suggests other reasons for the rejection of the Acts.

cover, perhaps, the antitypes of the Ertang of Mani.* CHAP. I.

Life of Mani.

Mani (we blend together and harmonise as far as possible the conflicting accounts of the Greeks and Asiatics) was of Persian birth†, of the sacred race of the Magi. He wore the dress of a Persian of distinction: the lofty Babylonian sandals, the mantle of azure blue, the parti-coloured trowsers, and the ebony staff in his hand.‡ He was a proficient in the learning of his age and country, a mathematician, and had made a globe; he was deeply skilled, as appears from his system, in the theogonical mysteries of the East, and so well versed in the Christian Scriptures, as to be said, and indeed he may at one time have been a Christian priest, in the province of Ahoriaz, that bordered on Babylonia.§ He began to propagate his doctrines during the reign of Shah-poor, but the son of Ardisheer would endure no invasion upon the established Magianism.‖ Mani fled from the wrath of his sovereign into Turkesthan; from

* It appears, I think, from Augustine, that all the splendid images of the sceptred king crowned with flowers, the Splenditenens and the Homophorus, were allegorically interpreted. Si non sunt ænigmata rationis, phantasmata sunt cogitationis, aut vecordia furoris. Si vero ænigmata esse dicuntur. Contra Faust. xv. p. 277. The extract from the "amatory song" (contra Faust. xv. 5.), with the twelve ages (the great cycle of 12,000 years) singing and casting flowers upon the everlasting sceptred king; the twelve gods (the signs of the zodiac), and the hosts of angels, is evidently the poetry, not the theology, of the system.

† His birth is assigned by the Chronicle of Edessa to the year 239. Beausobre, i.

‡ Beausobre, who is inclined to admit the genunineness of this description, in the Acts of Archelaus, has taken pains to show that there was nothing differing from the ordinary Persian dress. Vol. i. p. 97. &c.

§ In the Acts of Archelaus he is called a barbarous Persian, who understood no Greek, but disputed in Syriac, c. 36.

‖ Malcolm, i. 79.

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thence he is said to have visited India, and even China. * In Turkesthan, he withdrew himself from the society of men, like Mahomet in the cave of Hera†, into a grotto, through which flowed a fountain of water, and in which provision for a year had been secretly stored. His followers believed that he had ascended into heaven, to commune with the Deity. At the end of the year, he reappeared, and displayed his Ertang, embellished with its paintings, as the divine revelation.‡

In the theory of Mani, the one Supreme, who hovered in inaccessible and uninfluential distance over the whole of the Gnostic systems, the Brahm of the Indians, and the more vague and abstract Zeruane Akerene of Zoroastrianism, holds no place. The groundwork of his system is an original and irreconcilable Dualism.§ The two antagonist worlds of light and darkness, of spirit and matter, existed from eternity, separate, unmingled, unapproaching,

* Abulpharag, Dynast. p. 82. See Lardner, p. 167.

† Lardner considers the story of the cave a later invention borrowed from Mahomet. The relation of this circumstance by Mahometan authors leads me to the opposite conclusion. They would rather have avoided than invented points of similitude between their prophet and "the impious Sadducee," as he is called in the Koran. But see Baur's very ingenious and probable theory, which resolves it into a myth, and connects it with the Mithriac and still earlier astronomical or religious legends.

‡ Beausobre (i. 191, 192.) would find the Cascar at which, according to the extant, but much contested report, the memorable conference between Archelaus and Mani was held, at Cashgar in Turkhesthan. But independent of the improbability of a Christian bishop settled in Turkesthan, the whole history is full of difficulties, and nothing is less likely than that the report of such a conference should reach the Greek or Syrian Christians through the hostile territory of Persia.

§ Epiphanius gives these words as the commencement of Mani's work (in twenty-two books) on the Mysteries. Ἦν Θεὸς καὶ ὕλη, φῶς καὶ σκότος, ἀγαθὸν καὶ κακὸν, τοῖς πᾶσιν ἄκρως ἐναντία, ὡς κατὰ μηδὲν ἐπικοινοῦν θάτερον θατέρῳ. Epiphan. Hæret. lxvi. 14.

ignorant of each other's existence.* The kingdom of light was held by God the Father, who "rejoiced in his own proper eternity, and comprehended in himself wisdom and vitality:" his most glorious kingdom was founded in a light and blessed region, which could not be moved or shaken. On one side of his most illustrious and holy territory was the land of darkness, of vast depth and extent, inhabited by fiery bodies, and pestiferous races of beings.† Civil dissensions agitated the world of darkness; the defeated faction fled to the heights or to the extreme verge of their world.‡ They beheld with amazement, and with envy, the beautiful and peaceful regions of light.§ They determined to invade the delightful realm; and the primal man, the archetypal Adam, was formed to defend the borders against this irruption of the

* Hæ quidem in exordio fuerunt duæ substantiæ a sese diversæ. Et luminis quidem imperium tenebat Deus Pater, in suâ sanctâ stirpe perpetuus, in virtute magnificus, naturâ ipsâ verus, æternitate propriâ semper exsultans, continens apud se sapientiam et sensus vitales * * * Ita autem fundata sunt ejusdem splendidissima regna super lucidam et beatam terram, ut a nullo unquam aut moveri aut concuti possint. Apud August. contra Ep. Manich. c. 13. n. 16.

† The realm of darkness was divided into five distinct circles, which may remind us of Dante's hell. 1. Of infinite darkness, perpetually emanating, and of inconceivable stench. 2. Beyond these, that of muddy and turbid waters, with their inhabitants; and 3. within, that of fierce and boisterous winds, with their prince and their parents. 4. A fiery but corruptible region (the region of destroying fire), with its leaders and nations. 5. In like manner, further within, a place full of smoke and thick gloom, in which dwelt the dreadful sovereign of the whole, with innumerable princes around him, of whom he was the soul and the source. Ep. Fundament. apud Augustin. contra Manich. c. 14. n. 19.

‡ The world of darkness, according to one statement, cleft the world of light like a wedge (Augustin. contr. Faust. iv. 2.); according to another (Titus Bostrensis, i. 7.) it occupied the southern quarter of the universe. This, as Baur observes, is Zoroastrianism. Bundehesch, part iii. p. 62.

§ Theodoret, Hæret. Fab. i. 26.

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hostile powers. He was armed with his five elements, opposed to those which formed the realm of darkness. The primal man was in danger of discomfiture in the long and fearful strife, had not Oromazd, the great power of the world of light, sent the living Spirit to his assistance. The powers of darkness retreated; but they bore away some particles of the divine light, and the extrication of these particles (portions of the Deity, according to the subtile materialism of the system) is the object of the long and almost interminable strife of the two principles. Thus, part of the Divinity was interfused through the whole of matter; light was, throughout all visible existence, commingled with darkness.† Mankind was the creation or the offspring of the great principle of darkness, after this stolen and ethereal light had become incorporated with his dark and material being. Man was formed in the image of the primal Adam; his nature was threefold, or perhaps dualistic; the body, the concupiscent or sensual soul (which may have been the influence of the body on the soul), and the pure, celestial, and intellec-

* Epiphan. Hæret. lxvi. 76. Titus Bostrensis, Augustin. de Hæret. c. 46.

† The celestial powers, during the long process of commixture, assumed alternately the most beautiful forms of the masculine and feminine sex, and mingled with the powers of darkness, who likewise became boys and virgins; and from their conjunction proceeded the still commingling world. This is probably an allegory, perhaps a painting. There is another fanciful poetic image of considerable beauty, and, possibly, of the same allegoric character. The pure elementary spirits soared upwards in "their ships of light," in which they originally sailed through the stainless element; those which were of a hotter nature were dragged down to earth; those of a colder and more humid temperament were exhaled upwards to the elemental waters. The ships of light are, in another view, the celestial bodies.

tual spirit. Eve was of inferior, of darker, and more material origin; for the creating Archon, or spirit of evil, had expended all the light, or soul, upon man. Her beauty was the fatal tree of Paradise, for which Adam was content to fall. It was by this union, that the sensual or concupiscent soul triumphed over the pure and divine spirit*; and it is by marriage, by sexual union, that the darkening race was propagated. The intermediate, the visible world, which became the habitation of man, was the creation of the principle of good, by his spirit. This primal principle subsisted in trinal unity (whether from eternity might, perhaps, have been as fiercely agitated in the Manichean as in the Christian schools); the Christ, the first efflux of the God of Light, would have been defined by the Manichean as in the Nicene creed, as Light of Light; he was self-subsistent, endowed with all the perfect attributes of the Deity, and his dwelling was in the sun.† He was the Mithra of the Persian system; and the Manichean‡ doctrine was Zoroastrianism under Christian appellations.‡ There is

* De Mor. Manichæor. c. 19. Acta Archelai, c. 10.

† According to the creed of Faustus, his *virtue* dwelt in the sun, his *wisdom* in the moon. Apud August. lib. xxx. p. 333.

‡ The Manicheans were Trinitarians, or at least used Trinitarian language. Augustin. contra Faust. c. xx. Nos Patris quidem Dei omnipotentis, et Christi filii ejus, et Spiritus Sancti unum idemque sub triplici appellatione colimus numen; sed Patrem quidem ipsum lucem incolere summam ac principalem, quam Paulus alias inaccessibilem vocat; Filium vero in hâc secundâ ac visibili luce consistere, qui quoniam sit et ipse geminus, ut eum Apostolus novit, Christum dicens esse Dei virtutem et Dei sapientiam, virtutem quidem ejus in sole habitare credimus, sapientiam vero in lunâ: nec non et Spiritus Sancti, qui est majestas tertia, aëris hunc omnem ambitum sedem fatemur ac diversorium, cujus ex viribus ac spiritali profusione terram quoque concipientem, gignere patibilem Jesum, qui est vita et salus hominum, qui suspensus ex ligno.

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an evident difference between the Jesus and the Christos throughout the system; the Jesus Patibilis seems to be the imprisoned and suffering light.

The Spirit, which made up the triple being of the primal principle of good, was an all-pervading æther, the source of life and being; which continually stimulating the disseminated particles of light, was the animating principle of the worlds. He was the creator of the intermediate world, the scene of strife, in which the powers of light and darkness contested the dominion over man; the one assisting the triumph of the particle of light which formed the intellectual spirit, the other embruting and darkening the imprisoned light with the corruption and sensual pollutions of matter. But the powers of darkness obtained the mastery, and man was rapidly degenerating into the baser destiny; the Homophorus, the Atlas on whose shoulders the earth rests, began to tremble and totter under his increasing burden. * Then the Christ descended from his dwelling in the sun; assumed a form *apparently* human; the Jews incited by the prince of darkness, crucified his phantom form; but he left behind his Gospel, which dimly and imperfectly

* Homophorus and his ally, the Splenditenens, who assists him in maintaining the earth in its equilibrium, is one of the most incongruous and least necessary parts of the Manichean system.

Is the origin of these images the notion of supporters of the earth which are so common in the East? Are any of these fables older than the introduction of Manicheism? Is it the old Indian fable under another form? or is it the Greek Atlas? I am inclined to look to India for the origin.

Beausobre's objection, that such a fiction is inconsistent with Mani's mathematical knowledge, and his formation of a globe, is of no inconsiderable weight, if it is not mere poetry.

taught, what was now revealed in all its full effulgence by Mani the Persian.

The celestial bodies, which had been formed by the living spirit of the purer element, were the witnesses and co-operators in the great strife.* To the sun, the dwelling of the Christ, were drawn up the purified souls, in which the principle of light had prevailed, and passed onward for ablution in the pure water, which forms the moon; and then, after fifteen days, returned to the source of light in the sun. The spirits of evil, on the creation of the visible world, lest they should fly away, and bear off into irrecoverable darkness the light which was still floating about, had been seized by the living spirit, and bound to the stars. Hence the malignant influences of the constellations; hence all the terrific and destructive fury of the elements. While the soft and refreshing and fertilising showers are the distillation of the celestial spirit, the thunders are the roarings, the lightning the flashing wrath, the hurricane the furious breath, the torrent and destructive rains the sweat, of the Dæmon of darkness. This wrath is peculiarly excited by the extrication of the passive Jesus, who was said to have been begotten upon the all-conceiving earth, from his power,

* Lardner has well expressed the Manichean notion of the formation of the celestial bodies, which were made, the sun of the *good* fire, the moon of the *good* water. "In a word, not to be too minute, the Creator formed the sun and moon out of those parts of the light which had preserved their original purity. The visible or inferior heavens (for now we do not speak of the supreme heaven) and the rest of the planets were formed of those parts of light which were but little corrupted with matter. The rest he left in our world, which are no other than those parts of light which had suffered most by the contagion of matter." Lardner's Works, 4to ed. ii. 193.

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by the pure Spirit. The passive Jesus is an emblem, in one sense, it should seem, or type of mankind; more properly, in another, of the imprisoned deity or light. For gradually the souls of men were drawn upwards to the purifying sun; they passed through the twelve signs of the zodiac to the moon, whose waxing and waning was the reception and transmission of light to the sun, and from the sun to the Fountain of Light. Those which were less pure passed again through different bodies, gradually became defæcated, during this long metempsychosis: and there only remained a few obstinately and inveterately embruted in darkness, whom the final consummation of the visible world would leave in the irreclaimable society of the evil powers. At that consummation, the Homophorus would shake off his load; the world would be dissolved in fire*; the powers of darkness cast back for all eternity to their primæval state; the condemned souls would be kneaded up for ever in impenetrable matter, while the purified souls, in martial hosts, would surround the frontier of the region of light, and for ever prohibit any new irruption from the antagonist world of darkness.

The worship of the Manicheans was simple: they built no altar, they raised no temple, they had no images, they had no imposing ceremonial. Pure and simple prayer was their only form of adoration†; they did not celebrate the birth of

* Acta Disput. c. ii. Epiphan. c. 58.

† Faustus expresses this sentiment very finely. Item Pagani aris, delubris, simulacris, atque incenso Deum colendum putant. Ego ab his in hoc quoque multum diversus incedo, qui ipsum me, si

Christ, for of his birth they denied the reality; their paschal feast, as they equally disbelieved the reality of Christ's passion, though kept holy, had little of the Christian form. Prayers addressed to the sun, or at least with their faces directed to that tabernacle in which Christ dwelt; hymns to the great principle of light; exhortations to subdue the dark and sensual element within, and the study of the marvellous book of Mani, constituted their devotion. They observed the Lord's day; they administered baptism, probably with oil; for they seem (though this point is obscure) to have rejected water-baptism; they celebrated the Eucharist; but as they abstained altogether from wine, they probably used pure water or water mingled with raisins.* Their manners were austere, and ascetic; they tolerated, but only tolerated marriage, and that only among the inferior orders †: the theatre, the ban-

modo sim dignus, rationabile Dei templum puto. Vivum vivæ majestatis simulacrum Christum filium ejus accipio; aram, mentem puris artibus et disciplinis imbutam. Honores quoque divinos ac sacrificia in solis orationibus, et ipsis puris et simplicibus pono. Faust. apud August. xx. 3.

They bitterly taunted the Catholics with their Paganism, their sacrifices, their agapæ, their idols, their martyrs, their Gentile holidays and rites. Ibid.

* August. contra Faust. Disput. i. 2, 3.

† St. Augustine accuses them of breaking the fifth commandment. Tu autem doctrinâ dæmoniacâ didicisti inimicos deputare parentes tuos, quòd te per concubitum in carne ligaverint, et hoc modo utique deo tuo immundas compedes imposuerint. Adv.Faust. lib. xv. p. 278. Opinantur et prædicant diabolum fecisse atque junxisse masculam et feminam. Idem, lib. xix. p. 331. Displicet "crescite et multiplicamini," ne Dei vestra multiplicentur ergastula, &c. Adv. Secundum. c. 21.

Ἀπέχεσθαι γάμων καὶ ἀφροδισίων καὶ τεκνοποιΐας, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιπλεῖον ἡ δύναμις ἐνοικήσῃ τῇ ὕλῃ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ γένους διαδοχήν. Alexand. Lycop. c. 4.

They asserted, indeed, that their doctrines went no farther in this respect than those of the Catholic Christians. Faustus, 30. c. 4. Their opposition to marriage is assigned as among the

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quet, even the bath, were severely proscribed. Their diet was of fruits and herbs; they shrunk with abhorrence from animal food; and with Buddhist nicety, would tremble at the guilt of having extinguished the principle of life, the spark, as it were, of celestial light, in the meanest creature. This involved them in the strangest absurdities and contradictions, which are pressed against them by their antagonists with unrelenting logic.* They admitted penitence for sin, and laid the fault of their delinquencies on the overpowering influence of matter.† Mani suffered the fate of all who attempt to reconcile con-

causes of the enmity of the Persian king. Rex vero Persarum, cum vidisset tam Catholicos et Episcopos, quam Manichæos Manetis sectarios, a nuptiis abstinere; in Manichæos quidem sententiam mortis tulit. Ad Christianos vero idem edictum manavit. Quum igitur Christiani ad regem confugissent, jussit ille discrimen quale inter utrosque esset, sibi exponi. Apud Asseman. Biblioth. Orient. vii. 220.

There were, however, very different rules of diet and of manners for the elect and the auditors, much resembling those of the monks and other Christians among the Catholics. See quotations in Lardner, ii. 156.

* St. Augustine's Treatise de Mor. Manichæor. is full of these extraordinary charges. In the Confessions (iii. 10.), he says that the fig wept when it was plucked, and the parent tree poured forth tears of milk; "that particles of the true and Supreme God were imprisoned in an apple, and could not be set free but by the touch of one of the elect. If eaten, therefore, by one not a Manichean, it was a deadly sin; and hence they are charged with making it a sin to give any thing which had life to a poor man not a Manichean." "They showed more compassion to the fruits of the earth than to human beings." They abhorred husbandry, it is said, as continually wounding life, even in clearing a field of thorns; "so much more were they friends of gourds than of men."

An acknowledgment of the blamelessness of their manners is extorted from St. Augustine; at least he admits that, as far as his knowledge as a hearer, he can charge them with no immorality. Contr. Fortunat. in init. In other parts of his writings, especially in the tract de Morib. Manichæor, he is more unfavourable. But see the remarkable passage, contra Faust. v. i., in which the Manichean contrasts his *works* with the *faith* of the orthodox Christian.

flicting parties without power to enforce harmony between them. He was disclaimed and rejected with every mark of indignation and abhorrence by both. On his return from exile *, indeed, he was received with respect and favour by the reigning sovereign, Hormouz, the son of Shahpoor, who bestowed upon him a castle named Arabion. In this point alone the Greek and Oriental accounts coincide. It was from his own castle that Mani attempted to propagate his doctrines among the Christians in the province of Babylonia. The fame of Marcellus, a noble Christian soldier, for his charitable acts in the redemption of hundreds of captives, designated him as a convert who might be of invaluable service to the cause of Manicheism. According to the Christian account, Mani experienced a signal discomfiture in his conference with Archelaus, bishop of Cascar.† But his dispute with the Magian Hierarchy had a more fearful termination. It was an artifice of the new king Baharam to tempt the dangerous teacher from his castle. He was seized, flayed alive, and his skin, stuffed with straw, placed over the gate of the city of Shahpoor.

Death of Mani.

But wild as may appear his doctrines, they

* According to Malcolm he did not return till the reign of Baharam.

† Some of the objections of Beausobre to this conference appear insuperable. Allow a city named Cascar; can we credit the choice of Greek, even Heathen, rhetoricians and grammarians as assessors in such a city and in such a contest? Archelaus, it must indeed be confessed, plays the sophist; and if Mani had been no more powerful as a reasoner, or as a speaker, he would hardly have distracted the East and West with his doctrines. It is not improbably an imaginary dialogue in the form, though certainly not in the style, of Plato. See the best edition of it, in Routh's Reliquiæ Sacræ.

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expired not with their author. The anniversary of his death was hallowed by his mourning disciples.* The sect was organized upon the Christian model: he left his twelve apostles, his seventy-two bishops†, his priesthood. His distinction between the Elect‡ or the Perfect, and the Hearers or Catechumens, offered an exact image of the orthodox Christian communities; and the latter were permitted to marry, to eat animal food, and cultivate the earth.§ In the East and in the West the doctrines spread with the utmost rapidity; and the deep impression which they made upon the mind of man, may be estimated by Manicheism having become almost throughout Asia and Europe, a by-word of religious animosity. In the Mahometan world the tenets of the Sadducean, the impious Mani, are branded as the worst and most awful impiety. In the West the progress of the believers in this most dangerous of Heresiarchs was so successful, that the followers of Mani were condemned to the flames or to the mines, and the property of those who introduced the "execrable usages and foolish laws of the Persians" into the peaceful empire of Rome, confiscated to the im-

Propagation of his religion.

* Augustin contr. Epist. Manichæi, c. 9. The day of Mani's death was kept holy by his followers, because he *really* died; the crucifixion neglected, because Christ had but *seemingly* expired on the cross.

† Augustin. de Hæres, c. 46.

‡ The strangest notion was, that vegetables used for food were purified; that is, the divine principle of life and light separated from the material and impure, bypassing through the bodies of the Elect. Præbent alimenta electis suis, ut divina illa substantia in eorum ventre purgata, impetret eis veniam, quorum traditur oblatione purganda. Augustin. de Hæres, c. 46. It was a merit in the hearers to make these offerings. Compare Confess. iv. 1.

§ Auditores, qui appellantur apud eos, et carnibus vescuntur, et agros colunt, et si voluerint, uxores habent, quorum nihil faciunt qui vocantur Electi. Augustin. Epist. ccxxxvii.

perial treasury. One of the edicts of Dioclesian was aimed at their suppression.* St. Augustine himself† with difficulty escaped the trammels of their creed, to become their most able antagonist; and in every century of Christianity, Manicheism, when its real nature was as much unknown as the Copernican system, was a proverb of reproach against all sectaries who departed from the unity of the Church.

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The extent of its success may be calculated by the implacable hostility of all other religions to the doctrines of Mani: the causes of that success are more difficult to conjecture. Manicheism would rally under its banner the scattered followers of the Gnostic sects: but Gnosticism was never, it should seem, popular; while Manicheism seems to have had the power of exciting a fanatic attachment to its tenets in the lower orders. The severe asceticism of their manners may have pro-

* See the edict in Routh, iv. p. 285. Some doubt has been thrown on its authenticity. It is questioned by S. Basnage and by Lardner, though admitted by Beausobre. I cannot think the ignorance which it betrays of the "true principles of the Manichees," the argument adduced by Lardner, as of the least weight. Dioclesian's predecessors were as little acquainted with the "true principles of Christianity," yet condemned them in their public proceedings.

† There is something very beautiful in the language of St. Augustine, and at the same time nothing can show more clearly the strong hold which Manicheism had obtained on the Christian world. Illi in vos sæviant, qui nesciunt cum quo labore verum inveniatur, et quam difficile caveantur errores. Illi in vos sæviant qui nesciunt quam rarum et arduum sit carnalia phantasmata piæ mentis serenitate superare. * * * * Illi in vos sæviant, qui nesciunt quibus suspiriis et gemitibus fiat, ut ex quantulacunque parte possit intelligi Deus. Postremo illi in vos sæviant, qui nunquam tali errore decepti sint, quali vos deceptos vident. Contr Epist. Manichæi, c. 2. But the spirit of controversy was too strong for the charity and justice of Augustine. The tract which appears to me to give the fairest view of the real controversy, is the Disputatio contra Fortunatum.

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duced some effect; but in this respect they could not greatly have outdone monastic Christianity; and the distinct and definite impersonations of their creed, always acceptable to a rude and imaginative class, were encountered by formidable rivals in the dæmonology, and more complicated form of worship, which was rapidly growing up among the Catholics.*

Triumph of Christianity.

In the Eastern division of the Roman empire, Christianity had obtained a signal victory. It had subdued by patient endurance the violent hostility of Galerius; it had equally defied the insidious policy of Maximin; it had twice engaged in a contest with the civil government, and twice come forth in triumph. The edict of toleration had been extorted from the dying Galerius; and the Pagan Hierarchy, and more splendid Pagan ceremonial, with which Maximin attempted to raise up a rival power, fell to the ground on his defeat by Licinius, which closely followed that of Maxentius by Constantine. The Christian communities had publicly reassembled; the churches were rising in statelier form in all the cities; the bishops had reassumed their authority over their scattered but undiminished flocks. Though, in the one case, indignant animosity, and the desire of vindicating the severity of their measures against a sect dangerous for its numbers as well as its principles, in the other the glowing zeal of the martyr may be suspected of

* The Manicheans were legally condemned under Valentinian and Valens. The houses in which they held their meetings were confiscated to the state (Cod. Theodos. xvi. 3.). By Theodosius, they were declared infamous, and incapable of inheriting by law, xvi. 17.

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Numbers of the Christians.

some exaggeration, yet when a public imperial edict, and the declarations of the Christians themselves, assert the numerical predominance of the Christian party, it is impossible to doubt that their numbers, as well as their activity, were imposing and formidable. In a rescript of Maximin he states, that it had been forced on the observation of his august fathers, Dioclesian and Maximian, that almost all mankind had abandoned the worship of their ancestors, and united themselves to the Christian sect* ; and Lucianus, a presbyter of Antioch, who suffered martyrdom under Maximin, asserts in his last speech that the greater part of the world had rendered its allegiance to Christianity ; entire cities, and even the rude inhabitants of country districts.† These statements refer more particu-

* Σχεδὸν ἅπαντας ἀνθρώπους, καταλειφθείσης τῆς τῶν θεῶν θρησκείας, τῷ ἔθνει τῶν Χριστιανῶν συμμεμιχότας. Apud Euseb. Ec. Hist. ix. 9.

† Pars pœne mundi jam major huic veritate adstipulatur ; urbes integræ ; aut si in his aliquid suspectum videatur, contestatur de his etiam agrestis manus, ignara figmenti. This speech, it is true, is only contained in the Latin translation of Eusebius by Rufinus. But there is a calm character in its tone, which avouches its authenticity. The high authority of Porson and Dr. Routh require the addition of the following note. "Præstitisse aliis multitudine his quoque temporibus Christianos, scriptum extat apud Porphyrium, qui eos alicubi nominavit τοὺς πλείονας, ut me olim fecit certiorem eruditissimus Porsonus." Routh, Reliquiæ Sacræ, iii. 293. Gibbon has attempted to form a calculation of the relative numbers of the Christians (see ch. xv. vol. ii. p. 363. with my note); he is, perhaps, inclined to underrate the proportion which they bore to the Heathens. Yet, notwithstanding the quotations above, and the high authority of Porson and of Routh, I should venture to doubt their being the majority, except, possibly, in a few Eastern cities. In fact, in a population so fluctuating as that of the empire at this time, any accurate calculation would have been nearly impossible. M. Beugnot agrees very much with Gibbon ; and, I should conceive, with regard to the West, is clearly right, though I shall allege presently some reasons for the rapid progress of Christianity in the West of Europe.

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Different state of the East with regard to the propagation of Christianity.

larly to the East; and in the East various reasons would lead to the supposition, that the Christians bore a larger proportion to the rest of the population than in the other parts of the empire, except perhaps in Africa. The East was the native country of the new religion; the substratum of Judaism, on which it rested, was broader; and Judaism had extended its own conquests much farther by proselytism, and had thus prepared the way for Christianity. In Egypt and in the Asiatic provinces all the early modifications of Christian opinions, the Gnostic sects of all descriptions, had arisen; showing, as it were, by their fertility, the exuberance of religious life, and the congeniality of the soil to their prolific vegetation. The constitution of society was, in some respects, more favourable than in Italy to the development of the new religion. But it may be questioned whether the Western *provinces* did not at last offer the most open field for its free and undisputed course. In the East, the civilisation was Greek, or, in the remoter regions, Asiatic. The Romans assumed the sovereignty, and the highest offices of the government were long held by men of Italian birth. Some of the richer patricians possessed extensive estates in the different provinces, but below this the native population retained its own habits and usages. Unless in the mercantile towns, which were crowded with foreign settlers from all quarters, who brought their manners, their customs, and their deities, the whole society was Greek, Syrian, or Egyptian. Above all, there was a native religion; and however

this loose confederacy of religious republics, of independent colleges, or fraternities of the local or the national priesthoods, might only be held together by the bond of common hostility to the new faith, yet every where this religion was ancient, established, conformed to the habits of the people, endeared by local vanity, strengthened by its connection with municipal privileges, recognised by the homage, and sanctioned by the worship of the civil authorities. The Roman prefect, or proconsul, considered every form of Paganism as sufficiently identified with that of Rome, to demand his respect and support: every where he found deities with the same names or attributes as those of the imperial city; and every where, therefore, there was an alliance, seemingly close and intimate, between the local religion and the civil government.

Of the West.

In the Western provinces, Gaul, Spain, and Britain, but more particularly in Gaul, the constitution of society was very different. It was Roman, formed by the influx of colonists from different quarters, and the gradual adoption of Roman manners by the natives. It had grown up on the wane of Paganism. There was no old or established or national religion. The ancient Druidism had been proscribed as a dark and inhuman superstition, or had gradually worn away before the progress of Roman civilisation. Out of Italy, the gods of Italy were, to a certain degree, strangers: the Romans, as a nation, built no temples in their conquered provinces: the munificence of an individual, sometimes, perhaps, of the reigning Cæsar, after

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having laid down the military road, built the aqueduct, or encircled the vast arena of the amphitheatre, might raise a fane to his own tutelary divinity.* Of the foreign settlers, each brought his worship; each set up his gods; vestiges of every kind of religion, Greek, Asiatic, Mithriac, have been discovered in Gaul, but none was dominant or exclusive. This state of society would require or welcome, or at all events offer less resistance to the propagation of a new faith. After it had once passed the Alps†, Christianity made rapid progress; and the father of Constantine may have been guided no less by policy than humanity, in his reluctant and merciful execution of the persecuting edicts of Dioclesian and Galerius.

Such was the position of Christianity when Constantine commenced his struggle for universal empire: in the East, though rejected by the ancient rival of Rome, the kingdom of Persia, it was acknowledged as the religion of the state by a neighbouring nation; in the Roman provinces, it was emerging victorious from a period of the darkest trial; and though still threatened by the hostility of Maximin, that hostility was constrained to wear an artful disguise; and when it ventured to assume a more open form, was obliged to listen, at least with feigned respect, to the remonstrances of the

* Eumenius, in his panegyric on Constantine, mentions two temples of Apollo; of one, "the most beautiful in the world," the site is unknown: it is supposed to have been at Lyons or Vienne; the other was at Autun. Eumen. Paneg. xxi., with the note of Cellarius.

† Serius trans alpes, religione Dei susceptâ? Sulpec. Sever. H. E. lib. ii.

victorious Constantine. In the North, at least in that part from which Constantine derived his main strength, it was respected and openly favoured by the government. Another striking circumstance might influence the least superstitious mind, and is stated by the ecclesiastical historian, not to have been without effect on Constantine himself. Of all the Emperors who had been invested with the purple, either as Augusti or Cæsars, during the persecution of the Christians, his father alone, the protector of Christianity, had gone down to an honoured and peaceful grave.* Dioclesian, indeed, still lived, but in what, no doubt, appeared to most of his former subjects, an inglorious retirement. However the philosophy of the abdicated emperor might teach him to show the vegetables of his garden, as worthy of as much interest to a mind of real dignity as the distinctions of worldly honour; however he may have been solicited by a falling and desperate faction to resume the purple, his abdication was no doubt, in general, attributed to causes less dignified than the contempt of earthly grandeur. Conscious derangement of mind (a malady inseparably connected, according to the religious notions of Jew, Pagan, probably of Chris-

End of the persecutors of Christianity.

* Euseb. Vit. Const. i. 21.; Socrat. Eccles. Hist. i. 11. The language of the Ecclesiastical Historian Socrates is remarkable. Constantine, he says, was meditating the liberation of the empire from its tyrants: *καὶ ὡς ἦν ἐν τηλικάυτῃ φροντίδι, ἐπενόει τίνα θεὸν επίκουρον πρὸς τὴν μάχην καλέσειε, κατὰ νοῦν δὲ ἐλάμβανεν, ὡς οὐδὲν ὤναντο οἱ περὶ Διοκλητιανὸν, περὶ τοὺς ἑλλήνων θεοὺς διακείμενοι. ἡυρισκεν τε ὡς ὁ αὔτου πατὴρ, Κονστάντιος, ἀποστραφεὶς τὰς Ἑλλήνων θρησκείας, εὐδαιμονέστερον τὸν βιὸν διήγαγεν.* It was in this mood of mind that he saw the vision of the cross. Socr. Eccl. Hist. i. 2.

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tian, during that age, with the divine displeasure), or remorse of conscience, was reported to embitter the calm decline of Dioclesian's life. Instead of an object of envy, no doubt, in the general sentiment of mankind, he was thought to merit only aversion or contempt. Maximian (Herculius), the colleague of Dioclesian, after resuming the purple, engaging in base intrigues, or open warfare, against his son Maxentius, and afterwards against his protector Constantine, had anticipated the sentence of the executioner. Severus had been made prisoner, and forced to open his own veins. Galerius, the chief author of the persecution, had experienced the most miserable fate; he had wasted away with a slow and agonizing and loathsome disease. Maximin alone remained, hereafter to perish in miserable obscurity. Nor should it be forgotten, that the great persecutor of the Christians had been the jealous tyrant of Constantine's youth. Constantine had preserved his liberty, perhaps his life, only by the boldness and rapidity of his flight from the court of Galerius.*

War of Constantine against Maxentius.

Under all these circumstances, Constantine was advancing against Rome. The battle of Verona had decided the fate of the empire: the vast forces of Maxentius had melted away before the sovereign of Gaul: but the capital was still held with

* In his letter to Sapor, King of Persia, Constantine himself acknowledges the influence of these motives on his mind: ὃν πολλοὶ τῶν τῇδε βασιλευσάντων, μανιώδεσι πλάναις ὑπαχθέντες, ἐπεχείρησαν ἀρνήσασθαι, ἀλλ' ἐκείνους ἅπαντας τοιοῦτον τιμωρὸν τέλος κατανάλωσεν, ὡς πᾶν τὸ μετ' ἐκείνους ἀνθρώπων γένος, τὰς ἐκείνων συμφορὰς ἀντ' ἄλλου παραδείγματος, ἐπαράτους τοῖς τὰ ὅμοια ζηλοῦσι τίθεσθαι. Apud Theodoret. Ecc. Hist. i. c. 25.

the obstinacy of despair by the voluptuous tyrant Maxentius. Constantine appeared on the banks of the Tiber, though invested with the Roman purple, yet a foreign conqueror. Many of his troops were barbarians, Kelts, Germans, Britons; yet, in all probability, there were many of the Gaulish Christians in his army. Maxentius threw himself upon the gods, as well as upon the people of Rome: he attempted with desperate earnestness to rally the energy of Roman valour under the awfulness of the Roman religion. CHAP. I. A. D. 312.

Religion of Maxentius.

During the early part of his reign, Maxentius, intent upon his pleasures, had treated the religious divisions of Rome with careless indifference, or had endeavoured to conciliate the Christian party by conniving at their security. The deification of Galerius had been, as it were, an advance to the side of Paganism. The rebellion of Africa, which he revenged by the devastation of Carthage, was likely to bring him into hostile contact with the numerous Christians of that province. In Rome itself an event had occurred, which, however darkly described, was connected with the antagonist religious parties in the capital. A fire had broken out in the temple of the Fortune of Rome. The tutelary deity of the Roman greatness, an awful omen in this dark period of decline and dissolution, was in danger. A soldier, it is difficult to ascribe such temerity to any one but a Christian fanatic, uttered some words of insult against the revered, and it might be alienated, goddess. The indignant populace rushed upon

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the traitor to the majesty of Rome, and summoned the prætorian cohorts to wreak their vengeance on all who could be supposed to share in the sentiments of the apostate soldier. Maxentius is accused by one Christian and one Pagan historian, of having instigated the tumult; by one Pagan he is said to have used his utmost exertions to allay its fury. Both statements may be true; though at first he may have given free scope to the massacre, at a later period he may have taken alarm, and attempted to restore the peace of the city.* Of the direct hostility of Maxentius to Christianity, the evidence is dubious and obscure. A Roman matron preferred the glory, or the crime of suicide, rather than submit to his lustful embraces. But it was the beauty, no doubt, not the religion of Sophronia, which excited the passions of Maxentius, whose licentiousness comprehended almost all the noble families of Rome in its insulting range.† The Papal history, not improbably resting on more ancient authority, represents Maxentius as degrading the Pope Marcellus to the humble function of a groom, — the predecessor of the Gregories and Innocents swept the imperial stable.‡

* The silence of Eusebius as to the Christianity of the soldier, may be thought an insuperable objection to this view. But in the first place, the Eastern bishop was but imperfectly informed on the affairs of Rome, and might hesitate, if aware of the fact, to implicate the Christian name with that which was so long one of the most serious and effective charges against the faith, its treacherous hostility to the greatness of Rome. The words of the Pagan Zosimus are very strong: — Βλάσφημα ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ θείου στρατιωτῶν τις ἀφείς, καὶ τοῦ πλήθους διὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐσέβειαν ἐπελθόντος ἀναιρεθείς. Zos. Hist. ii. 13.

† Euseb. Vit. Const. i. 33, 34.

‡ Anastasius. Vit. Marcell.;

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His Paganism.

The darkening and more earnest Paganism of Maxentius is more clearly disclosed by the circumstances of his later history. He had ever listened with trembling deference to the expounders of signs and omens. He had suspended his expedition against Carthage, because the signs were not propitious.* Before the battle of Verona, he commanded the Sybilline books to be consulted. "The enemy of the Romans will perish," answered the prudent and ambiguous oracle; but who could be the enemy of Rome but the foreign Constantine, descending from his imperial residence at Treves, with troops levied in the barbarous provinces, and of whom the gods of Rome, though not yet declaredly hostile to their cause, might entertain a jealous suspicion.

On the advance of Constantine, Maxentius redoubled his religious activity. He paid his adoration at the altars of all the gods; he consulted all the diviners of future events.† He had shut himself in his palace, the adverse signs made him take refuge in a private house.‡ Darker rumours were propagated in the East: he is reported to have attempted to read the secrets of futurity in the entrails of pregnant women§; to have sought an alliance with the infernal deities, and endeavoured by magical formularies to avert the impending danger. However the more enlightened Pagans might disclaim the weak, licentious, and sanguinary Max-

Platina, Vit. Pontificum in Marcello.

* Zosimus, ii. 14.

† Euseb. Vit. Const. i. 21.: speaks of his κακοτέχνους καὶ γοητικὰς μαγγανείας.

‡ Zosimus, ii. 14.

§ Euseb. Vit. Const. i. 36.

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entius, as the representative either of the Roman majesty or the Roman religion, in the popular mind, probably, an intimate connection united the cause of the Italian sovereign with the fortunes and the gods of Rome. It is possible that Constantine might attempt to array against this imposing barrier of ancient superstition, the power of the new and triumphant faith: he might appeal, as it were, to the God of the Christians against the gods of the capital. His small, though victorious, army might derive courage in their attack on the fate-hallowed city, from whose neighbourhood Galerius had so recently returned in discomfiture, from a vague notion that they were under the protection of a tutelar deity, of whose nature they were but imperfectly informed, and whose worshippers constituted no insignificant part of their barbarian army.

Religion of Constantine.

Up to this period all that we know of Constantine's religion would imply that he was outwardly, and even zealously, Pagan. In a public oration his panegyrist extols the magnificence of his offerings to the gods.* His victorious presence was not merely expected to restore more than their former splendour to the Gaulish cities, ruined by barbaric incursions, but sumptuous temples were to arise at his bidding, to propitiate the deities, particularly Apollo, his tutelary God. The medals struck

* Merito igitur augustissima illa delubra tantis donariis honorâsti, ut jam vetera non quærant. Jam omnia vocare ad se templa videntur, præcipueque Apollo noster, cujus ferventibus aquis perjuria puniuntur, quæ te maxime oportet odisse. Nec magis Jovi Junonique recubantibus terra submisit, quam circa tua, Constantine, vestigia urbes et templa consurgunt. Eumenii Panegyr. cxxi.

for these victories are covered with the symbols of Paganism. Eusebius himself admits that Constantine was at this time in doubt which religion he should embrace; and after his vision, required to be instructed in the doctrines of Christianity.*

The scene in which the memorable vision of Constantine is laid, varies widely in the different accounts. Several places in Gaul lay claim to the honour of this momentous event in Christian history. If we assume the most probable period for such an occurrence, whatever explanation we adopt of the vision itself, it would be at this awful crisis in the destiny of Constantine and of the world, before the walls of Rome; an instant when, if we could persuade ourselves that the Almighty Ruler, *in such a manner*, interposed to proclaim the fall of Paganism and the establishment of Christianity, it would have been a public and a solemn occasion, worthy of the Divine interference. No where, on the other hand, was the high-wrought imagination of Constantine so likely to be seized with religious awe, and to transform some extraordinary appearance in the heavens into the sign of the prevailing Deity of Christ; no where, lastly, would policy more imperiously require some strong religious impulse to counterbalance the hostile terrors of Paganism, embattled against him.

Eusebius †, the Bishop of Cæsarea, asserts that

* Ἐννοεῖ δῆτα ὁποῖον δίοι θεὸν ἐπιγραψάσθαι βοηθὸν. Euseb. Vit. Constant. c. 27—32.

† Vit. Const. i. 28. The recent editor of Eusebius has well called the life of Constantine a Christian Cyropædia.

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Vision of Constantine.

Constantine himself made, and confirmed by an oath, the extraordinary statement, which was received with implicit veneration during many ages of Christianity, but which the severer judgment of modern historical inquiry has called in question, investigated with the most searching accuracy, and almost universally destroyed its authority with rational men, yet, it must be admitted, found no satisfactory explanation of its origin.* While Constantine was meditating in grave earnestness the claims of the rival religions, on one hand the awful fate of those who had persecuted Christianity, on the other the necessity of some divine assistance to counteract the magical incantations of his enemy, he addressed his prayers to the One great Supreme. On a sudden, a short time after noon, appeared a bright cross in the heavens, just above the sun, with this inscription, "By this, conquer." Awe

* The silence, not only of all cotemporary history (the legend of Artemius, abandoned even by Tillemont, does not deserve the name), but of Eusebius himself, in his Ecclesiastical History, gives a most dangerous advantage to those who altogether reject the story. But on whom is the invention of the story to be fathered? on Eusebius? who, although his conscience might not be delicately scrupulous on the subject of pious fraud, is charged with no more than the suppression of truth, not with the direct invention of falsehood. Or, on Constantine himself? Could it be with him a deliberate fiction to command the higher veneration of the Christian party? or had his imagination at the time, or was his memory in his later days, deceived by some inexplicable illusion?

The first excursus of Heinichen, in his edition of Eusebius, contains the fullest, and, on the whole, the most temperate and judicious discussion of this subject, so inexhaustibly interesting, yet so inexplicable, to the historical inquirer. There are three leading theories, variously modified by their different partisans. 1. A real miracle. 2. A natural phænomenon, presented to the imagination of the emperor. 3. A deliberate invention on the part of the Emperor, or of Eusebius. The first has few partisans in the present day. "Ut enim miraculo Constantinum a superstitione gentili avocatum esse, nemo facile hac ætate adhuc credet." Heini-

seized himself and the whole army, who were witnesses of the wonderful phenomenon. But of the signification of the vision Constantine was altogether ignorant. Sleep fell upon his harassed mind, and during his sleep Christ himself appeared, and enjoined him to make a banner in the shape of that celestial sign, under which his arms would be for ever crowned with victory.

Constantine immediately commanded the famous labarum to be made,—the labarum which for a long time was borne at the head of the imperial armies, and venerated as a sacred relic at Constantinople. The shaft of this celebrated standard was cased with

chen, p. 522. Independent of all other objections, the moral difficulty in the text is to me conclusive. The third has its partisans, but appears to me to be absolutely incredible. But the general consent of the more learned and dispassionate writers seems in favour of the second, which was first, I believe, suggested by F. Albert Fabricius. In this concur Schroeck, the German church historian, Neander, Manso, Heinichen, and, in short, all modern writers who have any claim to historical criticism.

The great difficulty which encumbers the theory which resolves it into a solar halo or some natural phænomenon is the legend ἐν τοῦτῳ νίκα, which no optical illusion can well explain if it be taken literally. The only rational theory is to suppose that this was the inference drawn by the mind of Constantine, and embodied in these words; which, from being inscribed on the Labarum, or on the arms or any other public monument, as commemorative of the event, gradually grew into an inseparable part of the original vision.

The later and more poetic writers adorn the shields and the helmets of the whole army with the sign of the cross.

> Testis Christicolæ ducis adventantis ad urbem
> Mulvius, exceptum Tiberina in stagna tyrannum
> Præcipitans, quanam victricia viderit arma
> Majestate regi, quod signum dextera vindex
> Prætulerit, quali radiarint stemmate pila.
> Christus purpureum, gemmanti textus in auro,
> Signabat labarum, *clypeorum insignia Christus*
> Scripserat: ardebat summis crux addita cristis.
>
> Prudent. in Symmachum, v. 482.

Euseb. Vit. Const. i. 38.; E. H. ix. 9.; Zosimus, ii. 15.; Manso, Leben Constantins, p. 41. seqq.

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gold; above the transverse beam, which formed the cross, was wrought in a golden crown the monogram, or rather the device of two letters, which signified the name of Christ. And so for the first time the meek and peaceful Jesus became a God of battle; and the cross, the holy sign of Christian redemption, a banner of bloody strife.

This irreconcileable incongruity between the symbol of universal peace and the horrors of war, in my judgment, is conclusive against the miraculous or supernatural character of the transaction.* Yet the admission of Christianity, not merely as a controlling power, and the most effective auxiliary of civil government (an office not unbecoming its divine origin), but as the animating principle of barbarous warfare, argues at once the commanding influence which it had obtained over the human mind, as well as its degeneracy from its pure and spiritual origin. The unimpeached and unquestioned authority of this miracle during so many centuries, shows how completely, in the association which took place between Barbarism and Christianity, the former maintained its predominance. This was the first advance to the military Chris-

* I was agreeably surprised to find that Mosheim concurred in these sentiments, for which I will readily encounter the charge of Quakerism.

Hæccine oratio servatori generis humani, qui peccata hominum morte suâ expiavit; hæccine oratio illo digna est, qui pacis auctor mortalibus est, et suos hostibus ignoscere vult. * * * * Caveamus ne veterum Christianorum narrationibus de ætatis suæ miraculis acrius defendendis in ipsam majestatem Dei, et sanctissimam religionem, quæ non hostes, sed nos ipsos debellare docet, injurii simus. De Reb. ante Const. 985. When the Empress Helena, among the other treasures of the tomb of Christ, found the nails which fastened him to the cross, Constantine turned them into a helmet and bits for his war-horse. Socrates, i. 17. True or fabulous, this story is characteristic of the *Christian* sentiment then prevalent.

tianity of the Middle Ages, a modification of the pure religion of the Gospel, if directly opposed to its genuine principles, still apparently indispensable to the social progress of men; through which the Roman empire and the barbarous nations, which were blended together in the vast European and Christian system, must necessarily have passed, before they could arrive at a higher civilisation and a purer Christianity.

The fate of Rome and of Paganism was decided in the battle of the Milvian Bridge; the eventual result was the establishment of the Christian empire. But to Constantine himself, if at this time Christianity had obtained any hold upon his mind, it was now the Christianity of the warrior, as subsequently it was that of the statesman. It was the military commander who availed himself of the assistance of any tutelar divinity, who might insure success to his daring enterprise.

Conduct of Constantine after his victory over Maxentius.

Christianity, in its higher sense, appeared neither in the acts nor in the decrees of the victorious Constantine after the defeat of Maxentius. Though his general conduct was tempered with a wise clemency, yet the execution of his enemies, and the barbarous death of the infant son of Maxentius, still showed the same relentless disposition which had exposed the barbarian chieftains, whom he had taken in his successful campaign beyond the Rhine, in the arena at Treves.* The Emperor still main-

* One of these barbarous acts was selected by the panegyrical orator as a topic of the highest praise. Puberes, qui in manus venerunt et quorum nec perfidia erat apta militiæ, nec ferocia severitati, ad pœnas spectaculo dati, sævientes bestias multitudine suâ fatigarunt. Eumenii Panegyr. c. xii.

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tained the same proud superiority over the conflicting religions of the empire, which afterwards appeared at the foundation of the new metropolis. Even in the labarum, if the initiated eyes of the Christian soldiery could discern the sacred symbol of Christ indistinctly glittering above the cross, there appeared, either embossed on the beam below, or embroidered on the square purple banner which depended from it, the bust of the Emperor and those of his family, to whom the heathen part of his army might pay their homage of veneration. Constantine, though he does not appear to have ascended to the Capitol, to pay his homage and to offer sacrifice* to Jupiter the best and greatest, and the other tutelary deities of Rome, in general the first act of a victorious emperor, yet did not decline to attend the sacred games.† Among the acts of the conqueror in Rome, was the restoration of the Pagan temples; among his imperial titles he did not decline that of the Pontifex Maximus.‡ The province of Africa, in return for the bloody head of their oppressor Maxentius, was permitted to found a college of priests in honour of the Flavian family.

Edict of Constantine from Milan.

The first public edict of Constantine in favour of Christianity is lost; that issued at Milan in the joint names of Constantine and Licinius, is the great charter of the liberties of Christianity.§ But

* Euseb. Vit. Const. i. 51. Le Beau, Histoire du Bas Empire, l. ii. c. xvi.

† Nec quidquam aliud homines, diebus munerum sacrorumque ludorum, quam te ipsum spectare potuerunt. Incert. Pane. c. xix.

‡ Zosimus, iv. 36.

§ The edict, or rather the copy, sent by Licinius to the Præfect of Bithynia in Lactantius, De Mori. Pers. xlviii.

it is an edict of full and unlimited toleration, and no more. It recognises Christianity as one of the legal forms by which the Divinity may be worshipped.* It performs an act of justice in restoring all the public buildings and the property which had been confiscated by the persecuting edicts of former emperors. Where the churches or their sites remained in the possession of the imperial treasury, they were restored without any compensation; where they had been alienated, the grants were resumed; where they had been purchased, the possessors were offered an indemnity for their enforced and immediate surrender, from the state. The præfects were to see the restitution carried into execution without delay, and without chicanery. But the same absolute freedom of worship was secured to all other religions; and this proud

* Decree of Milan, A. D. 313. Hæc ordinanda esse credidimus, ut daremus et Christianis et omnibus liberam potestatem sequendi religionem quam quisque voluisset, quod quidem *divinitas* in sede cœlesti nobis atque omnibus qui sub potestate nostrâ sunt constituti, placata ac propitia possit existere: (This divinitas, I conceive, was that equivocal term for the Supreme Deity, admitted by the Pagan as well as the Christian. What Zosimus called τὸ θεῖον,) etiam aliis religionis suæ vel observantiæ potestatem similiter apertam, et liberam, pro quiete temporis nostri esse concessam, ut in colendo quod quisque delegerit, habeat liberam facultatem, quia (nolumus detrahi) honori neque cuiquam religioni aliquid a nobis.

I will transcribe however the observations of Kestner on this point. Multi merito observârunt, animum illud ostendere (sc. decretum Mediolense) ab antiqua religione minime alienum. Observandum vero, parum hoc decretum valere, ut veram Constantini mentem, inde intelligamus. Non solus quippe illius auctor fuit, sed Licinius quoque—Huic autem—etsi iis (Christianis) non sincerus erat amicus, parcere debuit Constantinus; neque cæteris displicere voluit subditis, qui antiquam religionem profiterentur. Quamvis igitur etiam religionis indole plenius jam fuisset imbutus, ob rerum tamen, quæ id temporis erant, conditionem, manifestare mentem non potuisset. Kestner, Disp. de commut. quam, Constant. M. auct. societas subiit Christiana. Compare Heinichen, Excurs. in Vit. Const. p. 513.

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and equitable indifference is to secure the favour of the divinity to the reigning emperors. The whole tone of this edict is that of imperial clemency, which condescends to take under its protection an oppressed and injured class of subjects, rather than that of an awe-struck proselyte, esteeming Christianity the one true religion, and already determined to enthrone it as the dominant and established faith of the empire.

Earlier laws of Constantine.

The earlier laws of Constantine, though in their effects favourable to Christianity, claimed some deference, as it were, to the ancient religion in the ambiguity of their language, and the cautious terms in which they interfered with the liberty of Paganism. The rescript commanding the celebration of the Christian Sabbath, bears no allusion to its peculiar sanctity as a Christian institution. It is the day of the Sun, which is to be observed by the general veneration; the courts were to be closed, and the noise and tumult of public business and legal litigation were no longer to violate the repose of the sacred day. But the believer in the new Paganism, of which the solar worship was the characteristic, might acquiesce without scruple in the sanctity of the first day of the week. The genius of Christianity appears more manifestly in the single civil act, which was exempted from the general restriction on public business. The courts were to be open for the manumission of slaves on the hallowed day.* In the first aggression on the freedom of Paganism, though the earliest law speaks in a severe and

Sanctity of the Sunday.

* Cod. Theodos. ii. viii. 1. Vit. Constans. iv. 18.; Zosimus, i. 8.

vindictive tone, a second tempers the stern language of the former statute, and actually authorises the superstition against which it is directed, as far as it might be supposed beneficial to mankind. The itinerant soothsayers and diviners, who exercised their arts in private houses, formed no recognised part of the old religion. Their rites were supposed to be connected with all kinds of cruel and licentious practices—with magic and unlawful sacrifices. They performed their ceremonies at midnight among tombs, where they evoked the dead; or in dark chambers, where they made libations of the blood of the living. They were darkly rumoured not to abstain, on occasions, from human blood, to offer children on the altar, and to read the secrets of futurity in the palpitating entrails of human victims. These unholy practices were proscribed by the old Roman law and the old Roman religion. This kind of magic was a capital offence by the laws of the Twelve Tables. Secret divinations had been interdicted by former emperors,—by Tiberius and by Dioclesian.* The suppression of these rites by Constantine might appear no more than a strong regulation of police for the preservation of the public morals.† The soothsayer who should presume to enter a private house to practise his unlawful art, was to be burned alive; those who received him were condemned to the forfeiture of

Against Divination.

* Haruspices secreto ac sine testibus consuli vetuit. Suetonius, lib. c. 63. Ars mathematica damnabilis est et interdicta omnino. Compare Beugnot, i. 79.

† It was addressed to Maximus, præfect of the city. Cod. Theodos. xi. 8. 2.

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their property and to exile. But in the public temple, according to the established rites, the priests and diviners might still unfold the secrets of futurity*; the people were recommended to apply to them rather than to the unauthorised diviners, and this permission was more explicitly guaranteed by a subsequent rescript. Those arts which professed to avert the thunder from the house, the hurricane and the desolating shower from the fruitful field, were expressly sanctioned as beneficial to the husbandman. Even in case of the royal palace being struck by lightning, the ancient ceremony of propitiating the Deity was to be practised, and the haruspices were to declare the meaning of the awful portent.†

Constantine's encouragement of Christianity.

Yet some acts of Constantine, even at this early period, might encourage the expanding hopes of the Christians, that they were destined before long to receive more than impartial justice from the Emperor. His acts of liberality were beyond those of a sovereign disposed to redress the wrongs of an oppressed class of his subjects; he not merely enforced by his edict the restoration of their churches and estates, he enabled them, by his own munificence — his gift of a large sum of money to the Christians of Africa — to rebuild their ruined edifices, and restore their sacred rites with decent solemnity.‡ Many of the churches in Rome claim

* Adite aras publicas atque delubra, et consuetudinis vestræ celebrate solemnia: nec enim prohibemus præteritæ usurpationis officia liberâ luce tractari. Cod. Theod. xi. 16.

† Cod. Theodos. ix. 16. xvi. 10.

‡ See the original grant of 3000 folles to Cæcilian, bishop of Carthage, in Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. x. 6.

CHAP. I.

Churches in Rome.

the first Christian Emperor for their founder. The most distinguished of these, and, at the same time, those which are best supported in their pretensions to antiquity, stood on the sites now occupied by the Lateran and by St. Peter's. If it could be ascertained at what period in the life of Constantine these churches were built, some light might be thrown on the history of his personal religion. For the Lateran being an imperial palace, the grant of a basilica within its walls for the Christian worship (for such we may conjecture to have been the first church), was a kind of direct recognition, if not of his own regular personal attendance, at least of his admission of Christianity within his domestic circle.* The palace was afterwards granted to the Christians, the first patrimony of the Popes. The Vatican suburb seems to have been the favourite place for the settlement of foreign religions. It was thickly peopled with Jews from an early period†; and remarkable vestiges of the worship of Cybele, which appear to have flourished side by side, as it were, with that of Christianity, remained to the fourth, or the fifth, century.‡ The site of St. Peter's church was believed to occupy the spot hallowed by his martyrdom; and the Christians must have felt no unworthy pride in employing the materials of Nero's circus, the scene of the sanguinary pleasures of the first persecutor, on a church dedicated

* The Lateran was the residence of the Princess Fausta: it is called the Domus Faustæ in the account of the first synod held to decide on the Donatist schism. Optat. i. 23. Fausta may have been a Christian.

† Basnage, vii. 210.

‡ Bunsen und Platner Rome' Beschreibung, i. p. 23.

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to the memory of his now honoured, if not absolutely worshipped, victim.

With the protection, the Emperor assumed the control over the affairs of the Christian communities: to the cares of the public administration was added a recognised supremacy over the Christian church; the extent to which Christianity now prevailed, is shown by the importance at once assumed by the Christian bishops, who brought not only their losses and their sufferings during the persecution of Dioclesian, but, unhappily, likewise their quarrels before the imperial tribunal. From his palace at Treves, Constantine had not only to assemble military councils to debate on the necessary measures for the protection of the German frontier, and the maintenance of the imperial armies; councils of finance, to remodel and enforce the taxation of the different provinces; but synods of Christian bishops to decide on the contests which had grown up in the remote and unruly province of Africa. The Emperor himself is said frequently to have appeared without his imperial state, and, with neither guards nor officers around him, to have mingled in the debate, and expressed his satisfaction at their unanimity, whenever that rare virtue adorned their counsels.* For Constantine, though he could give protection, could not give peace to Christianity. It is the nature of men, that whatever powerfully moves, agitates to excess the public mind. With new

* Euseb. Vit. Const. lib. xliv. χαίροντα δεικνὺς ἑαυτὸν τῇ κοινῇ πάντων ὁμονοίᾳ. Eusebius says that he conducted himself as the bishop of the bishops.

views of those subjects which make a deep and lasting impression, new passions awaken. The profound stagnation of the human mind during the government of the earlier Cæsars had been stirred in its inmost depths, by the silent underworking of the new faith. Momentous questions, which, up to that time, had been entirely left to a small intellectual aristocracy, had been calmly debated in the villa of the Roman senator or the grove sacred to philosophy, or discussed by sophists, whose frigid dialectics wearied without exciting the mind, had been gradually brought down to the common apprehension. The nature of the Deity; the state of the soul after death; the equality of mankind in the sight of the Deity; even questions which are beyond the verge of human intellect; the origin of evil; the connection of the physical and moral world, had become general topics; they were, for the first time, the primary truths of a popular religion, and naturally could not withdraw themselves from the alliance with popular passions. These passions, as Christianity increased in power and influence, came into more active operation; as they seized on persons of different temperament, instead of being themselves subdued to Christian gentleness, they inflamed Christianity, as it appeared to the world, into a new and more indomitable principle of strife and animosity. Mankind, even within the sphere of Christianity, retrograded to the sterner Jewish character; and in its spirit, as well as in its language, the Old Testament began to dominate over the Gospel of Christ.

BOOK III.

Dissensions of Christianity.

The first civil wars which divided Christianity were those of Donatism and the Trinitarian controversy. The Gnostic sects, in their different varieties, and the Manichean, were rather rival religions than Christian factions. Though the adherents of these sects professed to be disciples of Christianity, yet they had their own separate constitutions, their own priesthood, their own ceremonial.

Donatism.

Donatism was a fierce and implacable schism in an established community. It was embraced with all the wild ardour, and maintained with the blind obstinacy, of the African temperament. It originated in a disputed appointment to the episcopal dignity at Carthage. The Bishop of Carthage, if in name inferior (for every thing connected with the ancient capital still maintained its superior dignity in the general estimation), stood higher, probably, in proportion to the extent of his influence, and the relative numbers of his adherents, as compared with the Pagan population, than any Christian dignitary in the West. The African churches had suffered more than usual oppression during the persecution of Dioclesian, not improbably during the invasion of Maxentius. External force, which in other quarters compressed the body into closer and more compact unity, in Africa left behind it a fatal principle of disorganisation. These rival claims to the see of Carthage brought the opponent parties into inevitable collision.

The pontifical offices of Paganism, ministering in a ceremonial, to which the people were either indifferent, or bound only by habitual attachment,

Christian hierarchy different from Pagan priesthood.

calmly descended in their hereditary course, were nominated by the municipal magistracy, or attached to the higher civil offices. They awoke no ambition, they caused no contention; they did not interest society enough to disturb it. The growth of the sacerdotal power was a necessary consequence of the development of Christianity. The hierarchy asserted (they were believed to possess) the power of sealing the eternal destiny of man. From a post of danger, which modest piety was compelled to assume by the unsought and unsolicited suffrages of the whole community, a bishopric had become an office of dignity, influence, and at times, of wealth. The prelate ruled not now so much by his admitted superiority in Christian virtue, as by the inalienable authority of his office. He opened or closed the door of the church, which was tantamount to an admission or an exclusion from everlasting bliss; he uttered the sentence of excommunication, which cast back the trembling delinquent among the lost and perishing Heathen. He had his throne in the most distinguished part of the Christian temple; and though yet acting in the presence and in the name of his college of presbyters, yet he was the acknowledged head of a large community, over whose eternal destiny he held a vague, but not therefore less imposing and awful dominion. Among the African Christians, perhaps by the commanding character of Cyprian, in his writings, at least, the episcopal power is elevated to its utmost height. No wonder that, with the elements of

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strife fermenting in the society, and hostile parties already arrayed against each other, the contest for this commanding post should be commenced with blind violence, and carried on with irreconcilable hostility.* In every community, no doubt, had grown up a severer party, who were anxious to contract the pale of salvation to the narrowest compass; and a more liberal class, who were more lenient to the infirmities of their brethren, and would extend to the utmost limits the beneficial effects of the redemption. The fiery ordeal of the persecution tried the Christians of Africa by the most searching test, and drew more strongly the line of demarcation. Among the summary proceedings of the persecution, which were carried into effect with unrelenting severity by Anulinus, the Præfect of Africa (the same who, by a singular vicissitude in political affairs, became the instrument of Constantine's munificent grants to the churches of his province†), none was more painful to the feelings of the Christians than the demand of the unconditional surrender of the furniture of their sacred edifices; their chalices, their ornaments, above all, the sacred writings.‡ The

* The principal source of information concerning the Donatist controversy is the works of Optatus, with the valuable collection of documents subjoined to them; and for their later history, various passages in the works of St. Augustine.

† See the grant of Constantine referred to above.

‡ There is a very curious and graphic account of the rigorous perquisition for the sacred books in the Gesta apud Zenophilum in Routh, vol. iv. p. 103. The codices appear to have been under the care of the readers, who were of various ranks, mostly, however, in trade. There were a great number of codices, each probably containing one book of the Scriptures.

bishop and his priests were made responsible for the full and unreserved delivery of these sacred possessions. Some from timidity, others considering that by such concessions, it might be prudent to avert more dangerous trials, and that such treasures, sacred as they were, might be replaced in a more flourishing state of the church, complied with the demands of the magistrate; but, by their severe brethren, who, with more uncompromising courage, had refused the least departure from the tone of unqualified resistance, they were branded with the ignominious name of Traditors.* This became the strong, the impassable, line of demarcation between the contending factions. To the latest period of the conflict, the Donatists described the Catholic party by that odious appellation.

The Traditors.

The primacy of the African church was the object of ambition to these two parties: an unfortunate vacancy at this time kindled the smouldering embers of strife. Mensurius had filled the see of Carthage with prudence and moderation during these times of emergency. He was accused by the sterner zeal of Donatus, a Numidian bishop, of countenancing, at least, the criminal concessions of the Traditors. It was said that he had deluded the government by a subtle stratagem; he had substituted certain heretical writings for the genuine Scriptures; had connived at their seizure, and calmly seen them delivered to the flames. The Donatists either dis-

Contest for the see of Carthage.

* The Donatists invariably called the Catholic party the Traditors. See Sermo Donatista and the Acts of the Donatist martyr.

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believed or despised, as a paltry artifice, this attempt to elude the glorious danger of resistance. But, during the life of Mensurius, his character and station had overawed the hostile party. But Mensurius was summoned to Rome, to answer to a charge of the concealment of the deacon Felix, accused of a political offence, — the publication of a libel against the Emperor. On his departure, he entrusted to the deacons of the community the valuable vessels of gold and silver belonging to the church, of which he left an accurate inventory in the hands of a pious and aged woman. Mensurius died on his return to Carthage. Cæcilian, a deacon of the church, was raised by the unanimous suffrages of the clergy and people to the see of Carthage. He was consecrated by Felix, Bishop of Apthunga. His first step was to demand the vessels of the church. By the advice of Botrus and Celeusius, two of the deacons, competitors it is said with Cæcilian for the see, they were refused to a bishop irregularly elected, and consecrated by a notorious Traditor. A Spanish female, of noble birth and of opulence, accused of personal hostility to Cæcilian, animated the Carthaginian faction; but the whole province assumed the right of interference with the appointment to the primacy, and Donatus, Bishop of Casæ Nigræ, placed himself at the head of the opponent party. The commanding mind of Donatus swayed the countless hierarchy which crowded the different provinces of Africa. The Numidian bishops took the lead; Secundus, the primate of Numidia, at the summons of Do-

natus, appeared in Carthage at the head of seventy of his bishops. This self-installed Council of Carthage proceeded to cite Cæcilian, who refused to recognise its authority. The Council declared his election void. The consecration by a bishop guilty of tradition, was the principal ground on which his election was annulled. But darker charges were openly advanced, or secretly murmured, against Cæcilian; charges which, if not entirely ungrounded, show that the question of tradition had, during the persecution, divided the Christians into fierce and hostile factions. He was said to have embittered the last hours of those, whose more dauntless resistance put to shame the timorous compliance of Mensurius and his party. He took his station, with a body of armed men, and precluded the pious zeal of their adherents from obtaining access to the prison of those who had been seized by the government*; he prevented, not merely the consolatory and inspiriting visits of kinsmen and friends, but even the introduction of food and other comforts, in their state of starving destitution. The Carthaginian faction proceeded to elect Majorinus to the vacant see. Both parties appealed to the civil power; and Anulinus, the Præfect of Africa, who during the reign of Dioclesian had seen the Christians dragged before his tribunal, and whose authority they then disclaimed with uncompromising unanimity, now saw them crowding in hostile factions to demand his interference in their domestic discords. The

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Appeal to the civil power.

* Optatus, i. 22.

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cause was referred to the imperial decision of Constantine. At a later period the Donatists, being worsted in the strife, bitterly reproached their adversaries with this appeal to the civil tribunal, "What have Christians to do with kings, or bishops with palaces?"* Their adversaries justly recriminated, that they had been as ready as themselves to request the intervention of the government. Constantine delegated the judgment in their cause to the bishops of Gaul†; but the first council was composed of a great majority of Italian bishops; and Rome, for the first time, witnessed a public trial of a Christian cause before an assembly of bishops, presided over by her prelate. The Council was formed of the three Gallic bishops of Cologne, of Autun, and of Arles. The Italian bishops (we may conjecture that these were considered the more important sees, or were filled by the most influential prelates), were those of Milan, Cesena, Quintiano, Rimini, Florence, Pisa, Faenza, Capua, Benevento, Terracina, Præneste, Tres Tabernæ, Ostia, Ursinum (Urbinum), Forum Claudii. Cæcilian and Donatus appeared each at the head of ten bishops of his party. Both

Council of Rome.

* Optatus, i. 22.

† Augustin, writing when the episcopal authority stood on a nearer or even a higher level than that of the throne, asserts that Constantine did not dare to assume a cognisance over the election of a bishop. Constantius non ausus est de causâ episcopi judicare. Epist. cv. n. 8. Natural equity as well as other reasons would induce Constantine to delegate the affair to a Christian commission. The account of Optatus ascribes to Constantine speeches which it is difficult to reconcile with his public conduct as regards Christianity at this period of his life. The Council of Rome was held, A. D. 313. 2d October.

The decrees of the Council of Rome and of Arles, with other documents on the subject, may be found in the fourth volume of Routh.

denounced their adversaries as guilty of the crime of tradition. The partisans of Donatus rested their appeal on the invalidity of an ordination by a bishop, Felix of Apthunga, who had been guilty of that delinquency. The party of Cæcilian accused almost the whole of the Numidian bishops, and Donatus himself, as involved in the same guilt. It was a wise and temperate policy in the Catholic party, to attempt to cancel all embittering recollections of the days of trial and infirmity; to abolish all distinctions, which on one part led to pride, on the other to degradation; to reconcile in these halcyon days of prosperity, the whole Christian world into one harmonious confederacy. This policy was that of the government. At this early period of his Christianity, if he might yet be called a Christian, Constantine was little likely to enter into the narrow and exclusive principles of the Donatists. As an emperor, Christianity was recommended to his favour by the harmonising and tranquillising influence which it exercised over a large body of the people. If it broke up into hostile feuds, it lost its value as an ally, or an instrument of civil government. But it was exactly this levelling of all religious distinctions, this liberal and comprehensive spirit, that would annihilate the less important differences, which struck at the vital principle of Donatism. They had confronted all the malice of the persecutor, they had disdained to compromise any principle, to concede the minutest point; and were they to abandon a superiority so hardly earned,

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and to acquiesce in the readmission of all those who had forfeited their Christian privileges to the same rank? Were they not to exercise the high function of readmission into the fold with proper severity? The decision of the Council was favourable to the cause of Cæcilian. Donatus appealed to the Emperor, who retained the heads of both parties in Italy, to allow time for the province to regain its quiet. In defiance of the Emperor, both the leaders fled back to Africa, to set themselves at the head of their respective factions. The patient Constantine summoned a new, a more remote council at Arles: Cæcilian and the African bishops were cited to appear in that distant province; public vehicles were furnished for their conveyance at the Emperor's charge; each bishop was attended by two of his inferior clergy, with three domestics. The Bishop of Arles presided in this Council, which confirmed the judgment of that in Rome.

A. D. 314. 1st Aug.

A second Donatus now appeared upon the scene, of more vigorous and more persevering character, greater ability, and with all the energy and self-confidence which enabled him to hold together the faction. They now assumed the name of Donatists. On the death of Majorinus, Donatus succeeded to the dignity of Anti-Bishop of Carthage: the whole African province continued to espouse the quarrel; the authority of the government, which had been invoked by both parties, was scornfully rejected by that against which the award was made. Three times was the decision

CHAP. I.

repeated in favour of the Catholic party, at Rome, at Arles, and at Milan; each time was more strongly established the self-evident truth, which was so late recognised by the Christian world, the incompetency of any council to reconcile religious differences. The suffrages of the many cannot bind the consciences, or enlighten the minds, or even overcome the obstinacy, of the few. Neither party can yield without abandoning the very principles by which they have been constituted a party. A commission issued to Ælius, Præfect of the district, to examine the charge against Felix, Bishop of Apthunga, gave a favourable verdict.* An imperial commission of two delegates to Carthage, ratified the decision of the former councils. At every turn the Donatists protested against the equity of the decree; they loudly complained of the unjust and partial influence exercised by Osius, Bishop of Cordova, over the mind of the Emperor. At length the tardy indignation of the government had recourse to violent measures. The Donatist bishops were driven into exile, their churches destroyed or sold, and the property seized for the imperial revenue. The Donatists defied the armed interference, as they had disclaimed the authority of the government. This first development of the principles of Christian sectarianism was as stern, as inflexible, and as persevering, as in later times. The Donatists drew their narrow pale around their persecuted sect,

A. D. 316.

Donatists persecuted.

* See the Acta Purgationis Felicis, in Routh, iv. 71.

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and asserted themselves to be the only elect people of Christ; the only people whose clergy could claim an unbroken apostolical succession, vitiated in all other communities of Christians by the inexpiable crime of tradition. Wherever they obtained possession of a church they burned the altar; or, where wood was scarce, scraped off the infection of heretical communion; they melted the cups, and sold, it was said, the sanctified metal for profane, perhaps for Pagan, uses; they rebaptised all who joined their sect; they made the virgins renew their vows; they would not even permit the bodies of the Catholics to repose in peace, lest they should pollute the common cemeteries. The implacable faction darkened into a sanguinary feud. For the first time human blood was shed in conflicts between followers of the Prince of Peace. Each party recriminated on the other, but neither denies the barbarous scenes of massacre and licence which devastated the African cities. The Donatists boasted of their martyrs, and the cruelties of the Catholic party rest on their own admission: they deny not, they proudly vindicate their barbarities. "Is the vengeance of God to be defrauded of its victims?"* and they appeal to the Old Testament to justify, by the examples of Moses, of Phineas, and of Elijah, the Christian

* This damning passage is found in the work of the Catholic Optatus: Quasi omnino in vindictam Dei nullus mereatur occidi. Compare the whole chapter, iii. 6. There is a very strong statement of the persecutions which they endured from the Catholics in the letter put in by the Donatist bishop Habet Deum in the conference held during the reign of Honorius. Apud Dupin. No. 258. in fine.

duty of slaying by thousands the renegades, or the unbelievers. CHAP. I.

In vain Constantine at length published an edict of peace: the afflicted province was rent asunder till the close of his reign, and during that of his son, by this religious warfare. For, on the other hand, the barbarous fanaticism of the Circumcellions involved the Donatist party in the guilt of insurrection, and connected them with revolting atrocities, which they were accused of countenancing, of exciting, if not actually sanctioning by their presence. That which in the opulent cities, or the well-ordered communities, led to fierce and irreconcileable contention, grew up among the wild borderers on civilisation into fanatical frenzy. Where Christianity has outstripped civilisation, and has not had time to effect its beneficent and humanising change, whether in the bosom of an old society, or within the limits of savage life, it becomes, in times of violent excitement, instead of a pacific principle to assuage, a new element of ungovernable strife. The long peace which had been enjoyed by the province of Africa, and the flourishing corn-trade which it conducted as the granary of Rome and of the Italian provinces, had no doubt extended the pursuits of agriculture into the Numidian, Gætulian, and Mauritanian villages. The wild tribes had gradually become industrious peasants, and among them Christianity had found an open field for its exertions, and the increasing agricultural settlements had become Christian bishoprics. But the savage was yet only

A. D. 321.

The Circumcellions.

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half-tamed; and no sooner had the flames of the Donatist conflict spread into these peaceful districts, than the genuine Christian was lost in the fiery marauding child of the desert. Maddened by oppression, wounded in his religious feelings by the expulsion and persecution of the bishops, from his old nature he resumed the fierce spirit of independence, the contempt for the laws of property, and the burning desire of revenge: of his new religion he retained only the perverted language, or rather that of the Old Testament, with an implacable hatred of all hostile sects; a stern ascetic continence, which perpetually broke out into paroxysms of unbridled licentiousness; and a fanatic passion for martyrdom, which assumed the acts of a kind of methodical insanity.

The Circumcellions commenced their ravages during the reign of Constantine, and continued in arms during that of his successor Constans. No sooner had the provincial authorities received instructions to reduce the province by force to religious unity, than the Circumcellions, who had at first confined their ravages to disorderly and hasty incursions, broke out into open revolt.* They defeated one body of the imperial troops, and killed Ursacius, the Roman general. They abandoned, by a simultaneous impulse, their agricultural pursuits; they proclaimed themselves the instruments of divine justice, and the protectors of the oppressed; they first asserted the wild theory of the

* The Circumcellions were unacquainted with the Latin language, and are said to have spoken only the Punic of the country.

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civil equality of mankind, which has so often, in later periods of the world, become the animating principle of Christian fanaticism; they proclaimed the abolition of slavery; they thrust the proud and opulent master from his chariot, and made him walk by the side of his slave, who, in his turn, was placed in the stately vehicle; they cancelled all debts, and released the debtors; their most sanguinary acts were perpetrated in the name of religion, and Christian language was profaned by its association with their atrocities; their leaders were the Captains of the Saints*; the battle hymn, Praise to God! their weapons were not swords, for Christ had forbidden the use of the sword to Peter, but huge and massy clubs, with which they beat their miserable victims to death.† They were bound by vows of the severest continence, but the African temperament, in its state of feverish excitement, was too strong for the bonds of fanatical restraint; the companies of the Saints not merely abused the privileges of war by the most licentious outrages on the females, but were attended by troops of drunken prostitutes, whom they called their sacred virgins. But the most extraordinary development of their fanaticism, was their rage for martyrdom. When they could not obtain it from the sword of the enemy, they inflicted it upon themselves. The

Passion for martyrdom.

* Augustin asserts that they were led by their clergy, v. xi. p. 575.

† The Donatists anticipated our Puritans in those strange religious names which they assumed. Habet Deum appears among the Donatist bishops in a conference held with the Catholics at Carthage. A. D. 411. See the report of the conference in the Donatistan Monumenta collected by Dupin, at the end of his edition of Optatus.

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ambitious martyr declared himself a candidate for the crown of glory: he then gave himself up to every kind of revelry, pampering, as it were, and fattening the victim for sacrifice. When he had wrought himself to the pitch of frenzy, he rushed out, and, with a sword in one hand and money in the other, he threatened death and offered reward to the first comer who would satisfy his eager longings for the glorious crown. They leapt from precipices; they went into the Pagan temples to provoke the vengeance of the worshippers.

Such are the excesses to which Christianity is constantly liable, as the religion of a savage and uncivilised people; but, on the other hand, it must be laid down as a political axiom equally universal, that this fanaticism rarely bursts out into disorders dangerous to society, unless goaded and maddened by persecution.

Donatism was the fatal schism of one province of Christendom: the few communities formed on these rigid principles in Spain and in Rome died away in neglect; but however diminished its influence, it distracted the African province for three centuries, and was only finally extirpated with Christianity itself, by the all-absorbing progress of Mahometanism. At one time Constantine resorted to milder measures, and issued an edict of toleration. But in the reign of Constans, the persecution was renewed with more unrelenting severity. Two imperial officers, Paul and Macurius, were sent to reduce the province to religious unity. The Cir-

cumcellions encountered them with obstinate valour, but were totally defeated in the sanguinary battle of Bagnia. In the later reigns, when the laws against heresy became more frequent and severe, the Donatists were named with marked reprobation in the condemnatory edicts. Yet, in the time of Honorius, they boasted in a conference with the Catholics, that they equally divided at least the province of Numidia, and that the Catholics only obtained a majority of bishops by the unfair means of subdividing the sees. This conference was held in the vain, though then it might not appear ungrounded, hope of reuniting the great body of the Donatists with the Catholic communion. The Donatists, says Gibbon, with his usual sarcasm, and more than his usual truth, had received a practical lesson on the consequences of their own principles. A small sect, the Maximinians, had been formed within their body, who asserted themselves to be the only genuine church of God, denied the efficacy of the sacraments, disclaimed the apostolic power of the clergy, and rigidly appropriated to their own narrow sect the merits of Christ, and the hopes of salvation. But neither this fatal warning, nor the eloquence of St. Augustin, wrought much effect on the Puritans of Africa; they still obstinately denied the legality of Cæcilian's ordination; still treated their adversaries as the dastardly traditors of the Sacred Writings; still dwelt apart in the unquestioning conviction that they were the sole subjects of the kingdom of Heaven; that to them

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alone belonged the privilege of immortality through Christ, while the rest of the world, the unworthy followers of Christ, not less than the blind and unconverted Heathen, were perishing in their outcast and desperate state of condemnation.

CHAPTER II.

CONSTANTINE BECOMES SOLE EMPEROR.

The East still Pagan.

By the victory over Maxentius, Constantine had become master of half the Roman world. Christianity, if it had not contributed to the success, shared the advantage of the triumph. By the edict of Milan the Christians had resumed all their former rights as citizens, their churches were re-opened, their public services recommenced, and their silent work of aggression on the hostile Paganism began again under the most promising auspices. The equal favour with which they were beheld by the sovereign, appeared both to their enemies and to themselves an open declaration on their side. The public acts, the laws, and the medals of Constantine *, show how the lofty eclectic indifferentism of the Emperor, which extended impartial protection over all the conflicting faiths, or attempted to mingle together their least inharmonious elements, gradually but slowly gave place to the progressive influence of Christianity. Christian bishops appeared as regular attendants upon the court; the

* Eckhel supposes that the heathen symbols disappeared from the coins of Constantine after his victory over Licinius. Doctr. Numm. in Constant.

I may add here another observation of this great authority on such subjects. Excute universam Constantini monetam, nunquam in eâ aut Christi imaginem aut Constantini effigiem cruce insignem reperies * * * * In nonnullis jam monogramma Christi ☧ ℘ inseritur labaro aut vexillo, jam in areâ nummi solitariè excubat, jam aliis, ut patebit, comparat modis.

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internal dissensions of Christianity became affairs of state; the Pagan party saw, with increasing apprehension for their own authority and the fate of Rome, the period of the secular games, on the due celebration of which depended the duration of the Roman sovereignty, pass away unhonoured.*

A. D. 315.

It was an extraordinary change in the constitution of the Western world, when the laws of the empire issued from the court of Treves, and Italy and Africa awaited the changes in their civil and religious constitution, from the seat of government on the barbarous German frontier. The munificent grant of Constantine for the restoration of the African churches, had appeared to commit him in favour of the Christian party, and had perhaps indirectly contributed to inflame the dissensions in that province.

Clerical order recognised by the law.

A new law recognised the clerical order as a distinct and privileged class. It exempted them from the onerous municipal offices, which had begun to press heavily upon the more opulent inhabitants of the towns. It is the surest sign of misgovernment, when the higher classes shrink from the posts of honour and of trust. During the more flourishing days of the empire, the Decurionate, the chief municipal dignity, had been the great object of provincial ambition. The Decurions formed the Senates of the towns; they supplied the magistrates from their body; and had the right of electing them.†

Under the new financial system introduced by

* Zosimus, l. ii. c. 1.

† Savigny Römische Recht. i. 18. Compare the whole book of the Theodosian Code, De Decurionibus. Persons concealed their property to escape serving the public offices. Cod. Theod. iii. 1—8.

Dioclesian, the decurions were made responsible for the full amount of taxation imposed by the cataster or assessment on the town and district. As the payment became more onerous or difficult, the tenants, or even the proprietors, either became insolvent, or fled their country. But the inexorable revenue still exacted from the decurions the whole sum assessed on their town or district. The office itself grew into disrepute, and the law was obliged to force that upon the reluctant citizen of wealth or character, which had before been an object of eager emulation and competition.* The Christians obtained the exemption of their ecclesiastical order from these civil offices. The exemption was grounded on the just plea of its incompatibility with their religious duties.† The Emperor declared in a letter to Cæcilian, bishop of Carthage, that the Christian priesthood ought not to be withdrawn from the worship of God, which is the principal source of the prosperity of the empire. The effect of this immunity shows the oppressed and disorganised state of society‡: numbers of persons, in order to secure this exemption, rushed at once into the clerical order of the Christians; and this manifest abuse demanded an immediate modification of

* See two dissertations of Savigny on the taxation of the empire, in the Transactions of the Berlin Academy, and translated in the Cambridge Classical Researches.

† The officers of the royal household, and their descendants, had the same exemption, which was likewise extended to the Jewish archisynagogi or elders. Le Beau, 165. Cod. Theodos. xvi. 8. 2.

The priests and the Flamines, with the decurions, were exempt from certain inferior offices, xii. v. 2.

‡ See the various laws on this subject. Codex Theodos. xvi. 2, 3. 6—11.

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A. D. 320. Exemption from the Decurionate.

the law. None were to be admitted into the sacred order, except on the vacancy of a religious charge, and then those only whose poverty exempted them from the municipal functions.* Those whose property imposed upon them the duty of the Decurionate, were ordered to abandon their religious profession. Such was the despotic power of the sovereign, to which the Christian church still submitted, either on the principle of passive obedience, or in gratitude for the protection of the civil authority. The legislator interfered without scruple in the domestic administration of the Christian community, and the Christians received the imperial edicts in silent submission. The appointment of a Christian, the celebrated Lactantius, to superintend the education of Crispus, the eldest son of the Emperor, was at once a most decisive and most influential step towards the public declaration of Christianity as the religion of the imperial family. Another important law, the groundwork of the vast property obtained by the church, gave it the fullest power to receive the bequests of the pious. Their right of holding property had been admitted apparently by Alexander Severus, annulled by Dioclesian, and was now conceded in the most explicit terms by Constantine.†

But half the world remained still disunited from

* Cod. Thedos. xvi. 2. 17. 19.

† Habeat unusquisque licentiam, sanctissimo Catholicæ venerabilique concilio, decedens bonorum, quod placet, relinquere. Non sint cassa judicia. Nihil est, quod magis hominibus debetur, quam ut supremæ voluntatis, postquam aliud jam velle non possint, liber sit status, et licens, quod iterum non redit, imperium. C. Th. xvi. 2. 4. De Episcopis. This law is assigned to the year 321.

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the dominion of Constantine and of Christianity. The first war with Licinius had been closed by the battles of Cibalæ and Mardia, and a new partition of the empire. It was succeeded by a hollow and treacherous peace of nine years.* The favour shown by Constantine to his Christian subjects, seems to have thrown Licinius upon the opposite interest. The edict of Milan had been issued in the joint names of the two Emperors. In his conflict with Maximin, Licinius had avenged the oppressions of Christianity on their most relentless adversary. But when the crisis approached, which was to decide the fate of the whole empire, as Constantine had adopted every means of securing their cordial support, so Licinius repelled the allegiance of his Christian subjects by disfavour, by mistrust, by expulsion from offices of honour, by open persecution, till, in the language of the ecclesiastical historian, the world was divided into two regions, those of day and of night. † The vices, as well as the policy of Licinius might disincline him to endure the importunate presence of the Christian bishops in his court; but he might disguise his hostile disposition to the churchmen in his declared dislike of eunuchs and of courtiers ‡,—the vermin, as he called them, of the palace. The stern avarice of Licinius would be contrasted to his disadvantage with the profuse liberality of Constantine; his looser debaucheries with the severer morals of the

Wars with Licinius.

Licinius becomes more decidedly Pagan.

* 314 to 323.

† Euseb. Vita Constant. i. 49.

‡ Spadonum et Aulicorum omnium vehemens domitor, tineas soricesque palatii eos appellans. Aur. Vict. Epit.

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Western Emperor. Licinius proceeded to purge his household troops of those whose inclination to his rival he might, not without reason, mistrust; none were permitted to retain their rank who refused to sacrifice. He prohibited the synods of the clergy, which he naturally apprehended might degenerate into conspiracies in favour of his rival. He confined the bishops to the care of their own dioceses.* He affected in his care for the public morals, to prohibit the promiscuous worship of men and women in the churches†; and insulted the sanctity of the Christian worship, by commanding that it should be celebrated in the open air. The edict prohibiting all access to the prisons, though a strong and unwilling testimony to the charitable exertions of the Christians, and by their writers represented as an act of wanton and unexampled inhumanity, was caused probably by a jealous policy, rather than by causeless cruelty of temper. It is quite clear that the prayers of the Christians, perhaps more worldly weapons, were armed in favour of Constantine. The Eastern churches would be jealous of their happier Western brethren, and naturally would be eager to bask in the equal sunshine of imperial favour. At length, either fearing the effect of their prayers with the Deity whom they addressed‡, or their influence in alienating the minds of their votaries from his own cause to that of him who, in the East, was considered

* Vit. Constant. i. 41.

† Vit. Constant. Women were to be instructed by the deaconnesses alone. Vit. Const. i. 53.

‡ Συντελεῖσθαι γὰρ οὐκ ἠγεῖτο ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ τὰς εὐχὰς, συνειδὼς φαύλῳ τοῦτο λογιζόμενος, ἀλλ' ὑπὲρ τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς βασιλέως πάντα πράττειν ἡμᾶς καὶ τὸν θεὸν ἱλεοῦσθαι πίπειστο. Euseb. x. 8.

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the champion of the Christian cause, Licinius commanded the Christian churches in Pontus to be closed; he destroyed some of them, perhaps for the defiance of his edicts. Some acts of persecution took place, the Christians fled again into the country, and began to conceal themselves in the woods and caves. Many instances of violence, some of martyrdom, occurred*, particularly in Pontus. There was a wide-spread apprehension that a new and general persecution was about to break out, when the Emperor of the West moved, in the language of the Christian historian, to rescue the whole of mankind from the tyranny of one.†

Whether, in fact, Licinius avowed the imminent war to be a strife for mastery between the two religions, the decisive struggle between the ancient gods of Rome and the new divinity of the Christians‡; whether he actually led the chief officers and his most eminent political partisans into a beautiful consecrated grove, crowded with the images of the gods; and appealed, by the light of blazing torches, and amid the smoke of sacrifice, to the gods of their ancestors against his atheistic adversaries, the followers of a

* Sozomen, H. E. i. 7., asserts, that many of the clergy, as well as bishops, were martyred. Dodwell however observes (De Paucitate Martyrum, 91.) Caveant fabulatores ne quos alios sub Licinio martyres faciant præterquam episcopos. Compare Ruinart. There is great difficulty about Basileus, Bishop of Amasa. He is generally reckoned by the Greek writers as a martyr (see Pagi ad an. 316. n. x.); but he is expressly stated by Philostorgius (lib. i.), confirmed by Athanasius (Orat. I. contra Arianos), to have been present at the Council of Nice some years afterwards.

† Vit. Const. ii. 5.

‡ Ὑπαχθείς τισιν ὑπισχνουμένοις αὐτῷ κρατήσειν, εἰς ἐλλήνισμον ἐτράπη. Sozomen, i. 7.

Sacrifices and divinations were resorted to, and promised to Licinius universal empire.

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foreign and unknown deity, whose ignominious sign was displayed in the van of their armies; yet the propagation of such stories shows how completely, according to their own sentiments, the interests of Christianity were identified with the cause of Constantine.* On both sides were again marshalled all the supernatural terrors which religious hope or superstitious awe could summon. Diviners, soothsayers, and Egyptian magicians, animated the troops of Licinius.† The Christians in the army of Constantine attributed all their success to the prayers of the pious bishops who accompanied his army, and especially to the holy labarum, whose bearer passed unhurt among showers of fatal javelins.‡

Battle of Hadrianople. A.D. 323.

The battle of Hadrianople, and the naval victory of Crispus, decided the fate of the world, and the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire. The death of Licinius reunited the whole Roman world under the sceptre of Constantine.

Eusebius ascribes to Constantine, during this battle, an act of Christian mercy, at least as unusual as the appearance of the banner of the cross at the head of the Roman army. He issued orders to spare the lives of his enemies, and offered rewards for all captives brought in alive. Even if this be not strictly true, its exaggeration or invention, or even its relation as a praiseworthy act, shows the new spirit which was working in the mind of man.§

* Vit. Constant. ii. 4.

† Euseb. Vit. Constant. i. 49.

‡ Eusebius declares that he heard this from the lips of Constantine himself. One man, who in his panic gave up the cross to another, was immediately transfixed in his flight. No one actually around the cross was wounded.

§ Vit. Const. ii. 13.

Among the first acts of the sole emperor of the world, was the repeal of all the edicts of Licinius against the Christians, the release of all prisoners from the dungeon or the mine, or the servile and humiliating occupations to which some had been contemptuously condemned in the manufactories conducted by women; the recall of all the exiles; the restoration of all who had been deprived of their rank in the army, or in the civil service; the restitution of all property of which they had been despoiled, — that of the martyrs to the legal heirs, where there were no heirs to the church — that of the churches was not only restored, but the power to receive donations in land, already granted to the Western churches, was extended to the Eastern. The Emperor himself set the example of restoring all which had been confiscated to the state.

Constantine issued two edicts, recounting all these exemptions, restitutions, and privileges — one addressed to the churches, the other to the cities of the East; the latter alone is extant. Its tone might certainly indicate that Constantine considered the contest with Licinius as, in some degree, a war of religion: his own triumph and the fate of his enemies are adduced as unanswerable evidences to the superiority of that God whose followers had been so cruelly persecuted; the restoration of the Christians to all their property and immunities, was an act not merely of justice and humanity, but of gratitude to the Deity.

But Constantine now appeared more openly to the whole world as the head of the Christian com-

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munity. He sate, not in the Roman senate deliberating on the affairs of the empire, but presiding in a council of Christian bishops, summoned from
A. D. 325. all parts of the world, to decide, as of infinite importance to the Roman empire, a contested point of the Christian faith. The council was held at Nice, one of the most ancient of the Eastern cities. The transactions of the council, the questions which were agitated before it, and the decrees which it issued, will be postponed for the present, in order that this important controversy, which so long divided Christianity, may be related in a continuous narrative: we pass to the following year.

Conduct of Constantine to his enemies.

Up to this period Christianity had seen much to admire, and little that it would venture to disapprove in the public acts, or the domestic character of Constantine. His offences against the humanity of the Gospel would find palliation, or rather vindication and approval, in a warrior and a sovereign. The age was not yet so fully leavened with Christianity, as to condemn the barbarity of that Roman pride, which exposed without scruple the brave captive chieftains of the German tribes in the amphitheatre. Again, after the triumph of Constantine over Maxentius, this bloody spectacle had been renewed at Treves, on a new victory of Constantine over the *Barbarians*. The extirpation of the family of a competitor for the empire would pass as the usual, perhaps the necessary, policy of the times. The public hatred would applaud the death of the voluptuous Maxentius, and that of his family would be the inevitable consequences of his guilt. Li-

cinius had provoked his own fate by resistance to the will of God, and his persecution of the religion of Christ. Nor was the fall of Licinius followed by any general proscription; his son lived for a few years to be the undistinguished victim of a sentence which involved others, in whom the public mind took far deeper interest. Licinius himself was permitted to live a short time at Thessalonica*: it is said by some that his life was guaranteed by a solemn oath, and that he was permitted to partake of the hospitality of the conqueror†; yet his death, though the brother-in-law of Constantine, was but an expected event.‡ The tragedy which took place in the family of Constantine betrayed to the surprised and anxious world, that, if his outward demeanour showed respect or veneration for Christianity, its milder doctrines had made little impression on the unsoftened Paganism of his heart.

Crispus, the son of Constantine by Minervina, his first wife, was a youth of high and brilliant

A. D. 326.

* Le Beau (Hist des Empéreurs, i. 220.), recites with great fairness the varying accounts of the death of Licinius, and the motives which are said to have prompted it. But he proceeds to infer that Licinius *must* have been guilty of some new crime, to induce Constantine to violate his solemn oath.

† Contra religionem sacramenti Thessalonicæ privatus occisus est. Eutrop. lib. x.

‡ Eusebius says that he was put to death by the laws of war, and openly approves of his execution and that of the other enemies of God. Νόμῳ πολέμου διακρίνας τῇ πρεπούσῃ παρεδίδου τιμωρίᾳ * * καὶ ἀπώλλυντο, τὴν προσήκουσαν ὑπέχοντες δίκην, οἱ τῆς θεομαχίας σύμβουλοι. How singularly does this contrast with the passage above! See p. 388. (Vit. Const. ii. 13.) bigotry and mercy advancing hand in hand, — the sterner creed overpowering the gospel.

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Crispus, son of Constantine.

promise. In his early years his education had been entrusted to the celebrated Lactantius, and there is reason to suppose that he was imbued by his eloquent preceptor with the Christian doctrines; but the gentler sentiments instilled by the new faith had by no means unnerved the vigour or tamed the martial activity of youth. Had he been content with the calmer and more retiring virtues of the Christian, without displaying the dangerous qualifications of a warrior and a statesman, he might have escaped the fatal jealousy of his father, and the arts which were no doubt employed for his ruin. In his campaign against the Barbarians, Crispus had shown himself a worthy son of Constantine, and his naval victory over the fleet of Licinius had completed the conquest of the empire. The conqueror of Maxentius and of Licinius, the undisputed master of the Roman world, might have been expected to stand superior to that common failing of weak monarchs, a jealous dread of the heir to their throne. The unworthy fears of Constantine were betrayed by an edict, inconsistent with the early promise of his reign. He had endeavoured, soon after his accession, to repress the odious crime of delation; a rescript now appeared, inciting by large reward, and liberal promise of favour, those informations which he had before nobly disdained, and this edict seemed to betray the apprehensions of the government, that some widely ramified and darkly organised conspiracy was afoot. But if such conspiracy existed, it refused, by the secrecy of its own proceedings, to enlighten the public mind.

CHAP. II.

Rome itself, and the whole Roman world, heard with horror and amazement, that in the midst of the solemn festival, which was celebrating with the utmost splendour the twentieth year of the Emperor's reign, his eldest son had been suddenly seized, and, either without trial, or after a hurried examination, had been transported to the shore of Istria, and perished by an obscure death.* Nor did Crispus fall alone; the young Licinius, the nephew of Constantine, who had been spared after his father's death, and vainly honoured with the title of Cæsar, shared his fate. The sword of justice or of cruelty once let loose, raged against those who were suspected as partisans of the dangerous Crispus, or as implicated in the wide-spread conspiracy, till the bold satire of an eminent officer of state did not scruple, in some lines privately circulated, to compare the splendid but bloody times with those of Nero.†

Death of Crispus. April, A. D. 326.

But this was only the first act of the domestic tragedy; the death of his wife Fausta, the partner of twenty years of wedlock, the mother of his three surviving sons, increased the general horror. She was suffocated in a bath, which had been heated to an insupportable degree of temperature. Many

Death of Fausta.

* Vict. Epit. in Constantino. Eutrop. lib. x. Zosimus, ii. c. 29. Sidonius, v. epist. 8. Of the ecclesiastical historians, Philostorgius (lib. ii. 4.) attributed the death of Crispus to the arts of his stepmother. He adds a strange story, that Constantine was poisoned by his brothers in revenge for the death of Crispus. Sozomen, while he refutes the notion of the connection of the death of Crispus with the conversion of Constantine, admits the fact, l. i. c. 5.

† The Consul Albinus,—

Saturni aurea sæcla quis requiret?
Sunt hæc gemmea sed Neroniana.
Sid. Apoll. v. 8.

BOOK III.

rumours were propagated throughout the empire concerning this dark transaction, of which the real secret was no doubt concealed, if not in the bosom, within the palace of Constantine. The awful crimes which had thrilled the scene of ancient tragedy, were said to have polluted the imperial chamber. The guilty step-mother had either, like Phædra, revenged the insensibility of the youthful Crispus by an accusation of incestuous violence, or the crime, actually perpetrated, had involved them both in the common guilt and ruin. In accordance with the former story, the miserable Constantine had discovered too late the machinations which had stained his hand with the blood of a guiltless son: in the agony of his remorse he had fasted forty days; he had abstained from the use of the bath; he had proclaimed his own guilty precipitancy, and the innocence of his son, by raising a golden statue of the murdered Crispus, with the simple but emphatic inscription, "To my unfortunate son." The Christian mother of Constantine, Helena, had been the principal agent in the detection of the wicked Fausta; it was added, that, independent of her unnatural passion for her step-son, she was found to have demeaned herself to the embraces of a slave.

It is dangerous to attempt to reconcile with probability these extraordinary events, which so often surpass, in the strange reality of their circumstances, the wildest fictions. But according to the ordinary course of things, Crispus would appear the victim of political rather than of domestic jealousy. The innocent Licinius might be an object of suspicion, as implicated

in a conspiracy, against the power but not against the honour of Constantine. The removal of Crispus opened the succession of the throne to the sons of Fausta. The passion of maternal ambition is much more consistent with human nature than the incestuous love of a step-mother, advanced in life, and with many children, towards her husband's son. The guilt of compassing the death of Crispus, whether by the atrocious accusations of a Phædra, or by the more vulgar arts of common court intrigue, might come to light at a later period; and the indignation of the Emperor at having been deluded into the execution of a gallant and blameless son, the desire of palliating to the world and to his own conscience his own criminal and precipitate weakness, by the most unrelenting revenge on the subtlety with which he had been circumvented, might madden him to a second act of relentless barbarity.*

Pagan account of this event.

But at all events the unanimous consent of the Pagan, and most of the Christian authorities, as well as the expressive silence of Eusebius, indicate the unfavourable impression made on the public mind by these household barbarities. But the most remarkable circumstance is, the advantage which was taken of this circumstance by the Pagan party, to throw a dark shade over the conversion of Constantine to the Christian religion. Zosimus has preserved this report; but there is good reason for supposing that it was a rumour, eagerly propagated at the time by the more desponding votaries of

* Gibbon has thrown doubts on the actual death of Fausta, vol. iii. p. 110.

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Paganism.* In the deep agony of remorse, Constantine earnestly inquired of the ministers of the ancient religions, whether their lustrations could purify the soul from the blood of a son. The unaccommodating priesthood acknowledged the inefficacy of their rites in a case of such inexpiable atrocity †, and Constantine remained to struggle with the unappeased and unatoned horrors of conscience. An Egyptian, on his journey from Spain, passed through Rome, and being admitted to the intimacy of some of the females about the court, explained to the Emperor that the religion of Christ possessed the power of cleansing the soul from all sin. From that time Constantine placed himself entirely in the hands of the Christians, and abandoned altogether the sacred rites of his ancestors. If Constantine at this time had been long an avowed and sincere Christian, this story falls to the ground; but if, according to our view, there was still something of ambiguity in the favour shown by Constantine to Christianity, if it still had some-

* See Heyne's note on this passage of Zosimus.

† According to Sozomen, whose narrative, as Heyne observes (note on Zosimus, p. 552.), proves that this story was not the invention of Zosimus, but rather the version of the event current in the Pagan world; it was not a Pagan priest, but a Platonic philosopher, named Sopater, who thus denied the efficacy of any rite or ceremony to wash the soul clean from filial blood. It is true that neither the legal ceremonial of Paganism, nor the principles of the later Platonism, could afford any hope or pardon to the murderer. Julian (speaking of Constantine in Cæsar) insinuates the facility with which Christianity admitted the μιαιφονος, as well as other atrocious delinquents, to the divine forgiveness.

The bitterness with which the Pagan party judged of the measures of Constantine, is shown in the turn which Zosimus gives to his edict discouraging divination. "Having availed himself of the advantages of divination, which had predicted his own splendid successes, he was jealous lest the prophetic art should be equally prodigal of its glorious promises to others."

thing rather of the sagacious statesman than of the serious proselyte, there may be some slight groundwork of truth in this fiction. Constantine may have relieved a large portion of his subjects from grievous oppression, and restored their plundered property; he may have made munificent donations to maintain their ceremonial; he may have permitted the famous labarum to exalt the courage of his Christian soldiery; he may have admitted their representatives to his court, endeavoured to allay their fierce feuds in Africa, and sanctioned by his presence the meeting of the Council of Nice to decide on the new controversy, which began to distract the Christian world; he may have proclaimed himself, in short, the worshipper of the Christians' God, whose favourites seemed likewise to be those of fortune, and whose enemies were devoted to ignominy and disaster (such is his constant language*): but of the real character and the profounder truths of the religion he may still have been entirely, or, perhaps, in some degree disdainfully, ignorant: the lofty indifferentism of the emperor predominated over the obedience of the proselyte towards the new faith.

But it was now the *man*, abased by remorse, by the terrors of conscience, it may be by superstitious horrors, who sought some refuge against

* It is remarkable in all the proclamations and documents which Eusebius assigns to Constantine, some even written by his own hand, how almost exclusively he dwells on this worldly superiority of the God adored by the Christians over those of the Heathen, and the visible *temporal* advantages which attend on the worship of Christianity. His own victory and the disasters of his enemies are his conclusive evidences of Christianity.

BOOK III.

the divine Nemesis, the avenging furies, which haunted his troubled spirit. It would be the duty as well as the interest of an influential Christian to seize on the mind of the royal proselyte, while it was thus prostrate in its weakness, to enforce more strongly the *personal* sense of religion upon the afflicted soul. And if the Emperor was understood to have derived the slightest consolation under this heavy burthen of conscious guilt from the doctrines of Christianity; if his remorse and despair were allayed or assuaged; nothing was more likely than that Paganism, which constantly charged Christianity with receiving the lowest and most depraved of mankind among its proselytes, should affect to assume the tone of superior moral dignity, to compare its more uncompromising moral austerity with the easier terms on which Christianity *appeared* to receive the repentant sinner. In the bitterness of wounded pride and interest at the loss of an imperial worshipper, it would revenge itself by ascribing his change exclusively to the worst hour of his life, and to the least exalted motive. It is a greater difficulty, that, subsequent to this period the mind of Constantine appears to have relapsed in some degree to its imperfectly unpaganised Christianity. His conduct became ambiguous as before, floating between a decided bias in favour of Christianity, and an apparent design to harmonise with it some of the less offensive parts of Heathenism. Yet it is by no means beyond the common inconsistency of human nature, that, with the garb and attitude, Constan-

tine should throw off the submission of a penitent. His mind released from its burthen, might resume its ancient vigour, and assert its haughty superiority over the religious, as well as over the civil allegiance of his subjects. A new object of ambition was dawning on his mind; a new and absorbing impulse was given to all his thoughts — the foundation of the second Rome, the new imperial city on the Bosphorus.

Nor was this sole and engrossing object altogether unconnected with the sentiments which arose out of this dark transaction. Rome had become hateful to Constantine; for whether on this point identifying herself with the Pagan feeling, and taunting the crime of the Christian with partial acrimony, or pre-surmising the design of Constantine to reduce her to the second city of the empire, Rome assumed the unwonted liberty of insulting the Emperor. The pasquinade which compared his days to those of Nero was affixed to the gates of the palace; and so galling was the insolence of the populace, that the Emperor is reported to have consulted his brothers on the expediency of calling out his guards for a general massacre. Milder councils prevailed; and Constantine took the more tardy, but more deep-felt revenge, of transferring the seat of empire from the banks of the Tiber to the shores of the Bosphorus.

CHAPTER III.

FOUNDATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE.

Foundation of Constantinople

THE foundation of Constantinople marks one of the great periods of change in the annals of the world. Both its immediate* and its remoter connection with the history of Christianity, are among those results which contributed to its influence on the destinies of mankind. The removal of the seat of empire from Rome might, indeed, at first appear to strengthen the decaying cause of Paganism. The senate became the sanctuary, the aristocracy of Rome, in general, the unshaken adherents of the ancient religion. But its more remote and eventual consequences were favourable to the consolidation and energy of the Christian power in the West. The absence of a secular competitor allowed the papal authority to grow up and to develope its secret strength. By the side of the imperial power, perpetually contrasted with the pomp and majesty of the throne, constantly repressed in its slow but steady advancement to supremacy, or obliged to contest every point with a domestic antagonist, the Pope would hardly have gained more political

* Constantine seized the property of some of the temples, for the expense of building Constantinople, but did not change the established worship; so says Libanius.

Τῆς κατὰ νόμους δὲ θεραπείας ἐκίνησεν οὐδὲ ἓν. vol. ii. p. 162.

importance than the Patriarch of Constantinople. The extinction of the Western empire, which indeed had long held its court in Milan or Ravenna, rather than in the ancient capital, its revival only beyond the Alps, left all the awe which attached to the old Roman name, or which followed the possession of the imperial city, to gather round the tiara of the pontiff. In any other city the Pope would in vain have asserted his descent from St. Peter; the long habit of connecting together the name of Rome with supreme dominion, silently co-operated in establishing the spiritual despotism of the Papal see.

favourable to Christianity.

Even in its more immediate influence, the rise of Constantinople was favourable to the progress of Christianity. It removed the seat of government from the presence of those awful temples, to which ages of glory had attached an inalienable sanctity, and with which the piety of all the greater days of the republic had associated the supreme dominion and the majesty of Rome. It broke the last link which combined the pontifical and the imperial character. The Emperor of Constantinople, even if he had remained a Pagan, would have lost that power which was obtained over men's minds by his appearing in the chief place in all the religious pomps and processions, some of which were as old as Rome itself. The senate, and even the people, might be transferred to the new city; the deities of Rome clung to their native home, and would have refused to abandon their ancient seats of honour and worship.

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Constantinople a Christian city.

Constantinople arose, if not a Christian, certainly not a Pagan city. The new capital of the world had no ancient deities, whose worship was inseparably connected with her more majestic buildings and solemn customs. The temples of old Byzantium had fallen with the rest of the public edifices, when Severus, in his vengeance, razed the rebellious city to the ground. Byzantium had resumed sufficient strength and importance to resist a siege by Constantine himself in the earlier part of his reign; and some temples had reappeared during the reconstruction of the city.* The fanes of the Sun, of the Moon, and of Aphrodite, were permitted to stand in the Acropolis, though deprived of their revenues.† That of Castor and Pollux formed part of the Hippodrome, and the statues of those deities who presided over the games, stood undisturbed till the reign of Theodosius the Younger.‡

Building of the city.

Once determined to found a rival Rome on the shores of the Bosphorus, the ambition of Constantine was absorbed by this great object. No expense was spared to raise a city worthy of the seat of empire; no art or influence to collect inhabitants worthy of such a city. Policy forbade any measure which would alienate the minds of any class or order, who might add to the splendour or swell the population of Byzantium, and policy was the

* There is a long list of these temples in V. Hammer's Constantinopel und die Bosporus, i. p. 189. &c. Many of them are named in Gyllius, but it does not seem clear at what period they ceased to exist. The Paschal Chronicle, referred to by V. Hammer, says nothing of their conversion into churches by Constantine.

† Malala. Constantinus, x.

‡ Zosimus, ii. 31.

ruling principle of Constantine in the conduct of the whole transaction. It was the Emperor whose pride was now pledged to the accomplishment of his scheme, with that magnificence which became the second founder of the empire, not the exclusive patron of one religious division of his subjects. Constantinople was not only to bear the name, it was to wear an exact resemblance of the elder Rome. The habitations of men, and the public buildings for business, for convenience, for amusement, or for splendour, demanded the first care of the founder. The imperial palace arose, in its dimensions and magnificence equal to that of the older city. The skill of the architect was lavished on the patrician mansions, which were so faithfully to represent to the nobles, who obeyed the imperial invitation, the dwellings of their ancestors in the ancient Capitol, that their wondering eyes could scarcely believe their removal; their Penates might seem to have followed them.* The senate-house, the Augusteum, was prepared for their counsels. For the mass of the people, markets and fountains and aqueducts, theatres and hippodromes, porticoes, basilicæ and forums, rose with the rapidity of enchantment. One class of buildings alone was wanting. If some temples were allowed to stand, it is clear that no new sacred edifices were erected to excite and gratify the religious feelings of the

* Sozomen, ii. 3. In the next reign, however, Themistius admits the reluctance of the senators to remove: προτοῦ μὲν ὑπ' ἀνάγκης ἐτιμᾶτο ἡ γερουσία, καὶ ἡ τιμὴ τιμωρίας ἐδόκει μηδ'οτιοῦν διαφέρειν. Orat. Protrep. p. 57.

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Pagan party *, and the building of the few churches which are ascribed to the pious munificence of Constantine, seems slowly to have followed the extraordinary celerity with which the city was crowded with civil edifices. A century after, a century during which Christianity had been recognised as the religion of the empire, the metropolis contained only fourteen churches, one for each of its wards or divisions. Yet Constantine by no means neglected those measures which might connect the new city with the religious feelings of mankind. Heaven inspired, commanded, sanctified the foundation of the second Rome. The ancient ritual of Roman Paganism contained a solemn ceremony, which dedicated a new city to the protection of the Deity.

Ceremonial of the foundation.

An imperial edict announced to the world, that Constantine, by the command of God, had founded the eternal city. When the Emperor walked, with a spear in his hand, in the front of the stately procession which was to trace the boundaries of Constantinople, the attendants followed in wonder his still advancing footsteps, which seemed as if they never would reach the appointed limit. One of

* Of the churches built by Constantine, one was dedicated to S. Sophia (the supreme Wisdom), the other to Eirene, Peace: a philosophic Pagan might have admitted the propriety of dedicating temples to each of these abstract names. The consecrating to individual saints was of a later period. Soz. ii. 3. The ancient Temple of Peace, which afterwards formed part of the Santa Sophia, was appropriately transformed into a Christian church. The Church of the Twelve Apostles appears, from Eusebius (Vit. Const. iv. 58.), to have been built in the last year of his reign and of his life, as a burial-place for himself and his family. Sozomen, indeed, says that Constantine embellished the city πολλοῖς καὶ, μεγίστοις εὐκτηρίοις οἴκοις.

them, at length, humbly inquired, how much farther he proposed to advance. "When he that goes before me," replied the Emperor, "shall stop." But however the Deity might have intimated his injunctions to commence the work, or whatever the nature of the invisible guide which, as he declared, thus directed his steps, this vague appeal to the Deity would impress with the same respect all, and by its impartial ambiguity offend none, of his subjects. In earlier times the Pagans would have bowed down in homage before this manifestation of the nameless tutelar deity of the new city; at the present period they had become familiarised, as it were, with the concentration of Olympus into one supreme Being *; the Christians would of course assert the exclusive right of the one true God to this appellation, and attribute to his inspiration and guidance every important act of the Christian Emperor.†

But if splendid temples were not erected to the decaying deities of Paganism, their images were set up, mingled indeed with other noble works of art, in all the public places of Constantinople. If the inhabitants were not encouraged, at least they were not forbidden to pay divine honours to the immortal sculptures of Phidias and Praxiteles, which

* The expression of the Pagan Zosimus shows how completely this language had been adopted by the Heathen: πᾶς γὰρ χρόνος τῷ θείῳ βραχὺς, ἀεί τε ὄντι, καὶ ἰσομένῳ. He is speaking of an oracle, in which the Pagan party discovered a prediction of the future glory of Byzantium. One letter less would make it the sentence of a Christian appealing to prophecy.

† At a later period the Virgin Mary obtained the honour of having inspired the foundation of Constantinople, of which she became the tutelary guardian, I had almost written, deity.

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were brought from all quarters to adorn the squares and baths of Byzantium. The whole Roman world contributed to the splendour of Constantinople. The tutelar deities of all the cities of Greece (their influence of course much enfeebled by their removal from their local sanctuaries) were assembled. The Minerva of Lyndus, the Cybele of Mount Dindymus, which was said to have been placed there by the Argonauts, the Muses of Helicon, the Amphitrite of Rhodes, the Pan consecrated by united Greece after the defeat of the Persians, the Delphic Tripod. The Dioscuri overlooked the Hippodrome. At each end of the principal forum were two shrines, one of which held the statue of Cybele, but deprived of her lions and her hands, from the attitude of command distorted into that of a suppliant for the welfare of the city: in the other was the Fortune of Byzantium.* To some part of the Christian community this might appear to be leading, as it were, the Gods of Paganism in triumph; the Pagans were shocked on their part by their violent removal from their native fanes, and their wanton mutilation. Yet the Christianity of that age, in full possession of the mind of Constantine, would sternly have interdicted the decoration of a Christian city with these *idols;* the workmanship of Phidias or of Lysippus would have

* Euseb. Vit. Const. iii. 54. Sozomen, ii. 5. Codinus, or C. P. 30—62. Le Beau, i. 305.

Eusebius would persuade his readers that these statues were set up in the public places to excite the general contempt. Zosimus admits with bitterness that they were mutilated from want of respect to the ancient religion, ii. 31. Compare Socr. Ec. Hist. 1—16.

found no favour, when lavished on images of the Dæmons of Paganism. CHAP. III.

The ceremonial of the dedication of the city* was attended by still more dubious circumstances. After a most splendid exhibition of chariot games in the Hippodrome, the Emperor moved in a magnificent car through the most public part of the city, encircled by all his guards, in the attire of a religious ceremonial, and bearing torches in their hands. The Emperor himself bore a golden statue of the Fortune of the city in his hands. An imperial edict enacted the annual celebration of this rite. On the birthday of the city, the gilded statue of himself, thus holding the same golden image of Fortune, was annually to be led through the Hippodrome to the foot of the imperial throne, and to receive the adoration of the reigning Emperor. The lingering attachment of Constantine to the favourite superstition of his earlier days, may be traced on still better authority. The Grecian worship of Apollo had been exalted into the Oriental veneration of the Sun, as the visible representative of the Deity; and of all the statues which were introduced from different quarters, none were received with greater honour than those of Apollo. In one part of the city stood the Pythian, in the other the Sminthian deity.† The Delphic Tripod, which, according to Zosimus, contained an image of the god, stood upon the column of the three twisted serpents, supposed to represent the mythic Python. But on a still

* Paschal Chronicle, p. 529. edit. Bonn.
† Euseb. Vit. Const. iii. 54.

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Statue of Constantine.

loftier, the famous pillar of porphyry, stood an image in which (if we are to credit modern authority, and the more modern our authority, the less likely is it to have invented so singular a statement) Constantine dared to mingle together the attributes of the Sun, of Christ, and of himself.* According to one tradition, this pillar was based, as it were, on another superstition. The venerable Palladium itself, surreptitiously conveyed from Rome, was buried beneath it, and thus transferred the eternal destiny of the old to the new capital. The pillar, formed of marble and of porphyry, rose to the height of 120 feet. The colossal image on the top was that of Apollo, either from Phrygia or from Athens. But the head of Constantine had been substituted for that of the god. The sceptre proclaimed the dominion of the world, and it held in its hand the globe, emblematic of universal empire. Around the head, instead of rays, were fixed the nails of the true cross. Is this Paganism approximating to Christianity, or Christianity degenerating into Paganism? Thus Constantine, as founder of the new capital, might appear to some still to maintain the impartial dignity of Emperor of the world, presiding with serene indifference over the various nations, orders, and religious divisions which peopled his dominions; admitting to the privileges and advantages of citizens in the new Rome all who were tempted to make their dwelling around her seat of empire.

* The author of the Antiq. Constantinop. apud Banduri. See Von Hammer, Constantinopel und die Bosporus, i. 162. Philostorgius says that the Christians worshipped this image, ii. 17.

Yet, even during the reign of Constantine, no doubt, the triumphant progress of Christianity tended to efface or to obscure these lingering vestiges of the ancient religion. If here and there remained a shrine or temple belonging to Polytheism, built in proportion to the narrow circuit and moderate population of old Byzantium, the Christian churches, though far from numerous, were gradually rising, in their dimensions more suited to the magnificence and populousness of the new city, and in form proclaiming the dominant faith of Constantinople. The Christians were most likely to crowd into a new city; probably their main strength still lay in the mercantile part of the community: interest and religion would combine in urging them to settle in this promising emporium of trade, where their religion, if it did not reign alone and exclusive, yet maintained an evident superiority over its decaying rival. The old aristocracy, who were inclined to Christianity, would be much more loosely attached to their Roman residences, and would be most inclined to obey the invitation of the Emperor, while the large class of the indifferent would follow at the same time the religious and political bias of the sovereign. Where the attachment to the old religion was so slight and feeble, it was a trifling sacrifice to ambition or interest to embrace the new; particularly where there was no splendid ceremonial, no connexion of the priestly office with the higher dignity of the state; nothing, in short, which could enlist either old reverential feelings, or the imagin-

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ation, in the cause of Polytheism. The sacred treasures, transferred from the Pagan temples to the Christian city, sank more and more into national monuments, or curious remains of antiquity; their religious significance was gradually forgotten; they became, in the natural process of things, a mere collection of works of art.

The Amphitheatre.

In other respects Constantinople was not a Roman city. An amphitheatre, built on the restoration of the city after the siege of Severus, was permitted to remain, but it was restricted to exhibitions of wild beasts; the first Christian city was never disgraced by the bloody spectacle of gladiators.* There were theatres indeed, but it may be doubted whether the noble religious drama of Greece ever obtained popularity in Constantinople. The chariot race was the amusement which absorbed all others; and to this, at first, as it was not necessarily connected with the Pagan worship, Christianity might be more indulgent. How this taste grew into a passion, and this passion into a frenzy, the later annals of Constantinople bear melancholy witness. Beset with powerful enemies without, oppressed by a tyrannous government within, the people of Constantinople thought of nothing but the colour of their faction in the Hippodrome, and these more

* An edict of Constantine (Cod. Theod. xv. 12.), if it did not altogether abolish these sanguinary shows, restricted them to particular occasions. Cruenta spectacula in otio civili, et domesticâ quiete non placent. Criminals were to be sent to the mines. But it should seem that captives taken in war might still be exposed in the amphitheatre. In fact these bloody exhibitions resisted some time longer the progress of Christian humanity.

engrossing and maddening contentions even silenced the animosity of religious dispute.

During the foundation of Constantinople, the Emperor might appear to the Christians to have relapsed from the head of the Christian division of his subjects, into the common sovereign of the Roman world. In this respect, his conduct did not ratify the promise of his earlier acts in the East. He had not only restored Christianity, depressed first by the acts of Maximin, and afterwards by the violence of Licinius, but in many cases he had lent his countenance, or his more active assistance, to the rebuilding their churches on a more imposing plan. Yet, to all outward appearance, the world was still Pagan: every city seemed still to repose under the tutelary gods of the ancient religion: every where the temples rose above the buildings of men: if here and there a Christian church, in its magnitude, or in the splendour of its architecture, might compete with the solid and elegant fanes of antiquity, the Christians had neither ventured to expel them from their possessions, or to appropriate to their own use those which were falling into neglect or decay. As yet there had been no invasion but on the opinions and moral influence of Polytheism. The temples, indeed, of Pagan worship, though subsequently, in some instances, converted to Christian uses, were not altogether suited to the ceremonial of Christianity.*

Ancient temples.

* Compare an excellent memoir by M. Quatremère de Quincy on the means of lighting the ancient temples (Mem. de l'Institut. iii. 171.), and Hope on Architecture.

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The Christians might look on their stateliest buildings with jealousy — hardly with envy. Whether raised on the huge substructures, and in the immense masses of the older Asiatic style, as at Baalbec, or the original Temple at Jerusalem; whether built on the principles of Grecian art, when the secret of vaulting over a vast building seems to have been unknown; or, after the general introduction of the arch by the Romans had allowed the roof to spread out to ampler extent, — still the actual enclosed temple was rarely of great dimensions.* The largest among the Greeks were hypæthral, open to the sky.† If we judge from the temples crowded together about the Forum, those in Rome contributed to the splendour of the city rather by their number than their size. The rites of Polytheism, in fact, collected together their vast assemblages, rather as spectators than as worshippers. ‡ The altar itself, in general, stood in the open air, in the court before the temple, where the smoke might find free vent, and rise in its grateful odour to the heavenly dwelling of the Gods. The body of the worshippers, therefore, stood in the courts, or the surrounding porticoes. They might approach individually, and make their separate

* M. de Quincy gives the size of some of the ancient temples: Juno at Agrigentum 116 (Paris) feet; Concord, 120; Pæstum, 110; Theseus, 100; Jupiter at Olympia, or Minerva at Athens, 220—230; Jupiter at Agrigentum, 322; Selinus, 320; Ephesus, 350; Apollo Dindymus at Miletus, 360, p. 195.

† The real hypæthral temples were to particular divinities: Jupiter Fulgurator, Cœlum, Sol, Luna.

‡ Eleusis, the scene of the mysteries, of all the ancient temples had the largest nave; it was turbæ theatralis capacissimum. Vitruv. vii. Ὄχλον θεάτρου δέξασθαι δυνάμενον. Strabo.

libation or offering, and then retire to a convenient distance, where they might watch the movements of the ministering priest, receive his announcement of the favourable or sinister signs discovered in the victim, or listen to the hymn, which was the only usual form of adoration or prayer. However Christianity might admit gradations in its several classes of worshippers, and assign its separate station according to the sex, or the degree of advancement in the religious initiation; however the penitents might be forbidden, until reconciled with the church, or the catechumens before they were initiated into the community, to penetrate beyond the outer portico, or the inner division in the church; yet the great mass of a Christian congregation must be received within the walls of the building; and the service consisting not merely in ceremonies performed by the priesthood, but in prayers, to which all present were expected to respond, and in oral instruction; the actual edifice therefore required more ample dimensions.

Basilicas.

In many towns there was another public building, the Basilica, or Hall of Justice*, singularly adapted for the Christian worship. This was a large chamber, of an oblong form, with a plain flat exterior wall. The pillars, which in the temples were without, stood within the basilica; and the

* Le Basilique fut l'édifice des anciens, qui convint à la célébration de ses mystères. La vaste capacité de son intérieur, les divisions de son plan, les grandes ouvertures, qui introduisaient de toutes parts la lumière dans son enceinte, le tribunal qui devint la place des célébrans, et du chœur, tout se trouva en rapport avec les pratiques du nouveau culte. Q. de Quincy, p. 173. See Hope on Architecture, p. 87.

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porch, or that which in the temple was an outward portico, was contained within the basilica. This hall was thus divided by two rows of columns into a central avenue, with two side aisles. The outward wall was easily pierced for windows, without damaging the symmetry or order of the architecture. In the one the male, in the other the female, appellants to justice waited their turn.* The three longitudinal avenues were crossed by one in a transverse direction, elevated a few steps, and occupied by the advocates, notaries, and others employed in the public business. At the farther end, opposite to the central avenue, the building swelled out into a semicircular recess, with a ceiling rounded off; it was called *absis* in the Greek, and in Latin *tribunal.* Here sate the magistrate with his assessors, and hence courts of justice were called tribunals.

The arrangement of this building coincided with remarkable propriety with the distribution of a Christian congregation.† The sexes retained their separate places in the aisles; the central avenue became the nave, so called from the fanciful analogy of the church to the ship of St. Peter. The transept, the Βημα, or choros, was occupied by the inferior clergy and the singers.‡ The bishop took the throne of the magistrate, and the superior clergy ranged on each side on the seats of the assessors.

* According to Bingham (lviii. c. 3.), the women occupied galleries in each aisle above the men. This sort of separation may have been borrowed from the synagogue; probably the practice was not uniform.

† Some few churches were of an octagonal form; some in that of a cross. See Bingham, l. viii. c. 3.

‡ Apost. Const. l. ii. c. 57.

Before the throne of the bishop, either within or on the verge of the recess, stood the altar. This was divided from the nave by the cancelli, or bars, from whence hung curtains, which, during the celebration of the communion, separated the participants from the rest of the congregation.

As these buildings were numerous, and attached to every imperial residence, they might be bestowed at once on the Christians, without either interfering with the course of justice, or bringing the religious feelings of the hostile parties into collision.* Two, the Sessorian and the Lateran, were granted to the Roman Christians by Constantine. And the basilica appears to have been the usual form of building in the West, though, besides the porch, connected with, or rather included within, the building, which became the Narthex, and was occupied by the catechumens and the penitents, and in which stood the piscina, or font of baptism — there was in general an outer open court, surrounded with colonnades. This, as we have seen in the description of the church at Tyre, was general in the East, where the churches retained probably more of the templar form; while in Constantinople, where they were buildings raised from the ground, Constantine appears to have followed the form of the basilica.

By the consecration of these basilicas to the pur-

* There were eighteen at Rome; many of these basilicæ had become exchanges, or places for general business. Among the Roman basilicæ P. Victor reckons, the Basilicæ Argentariorum. Ciampini, tom. 1. p. 8.

Some basilicæ were of a very large size. One is described by the younger Pliny, in which 180 judges were seated, with a vast multitude of advocates and auditors. Plin. Epist. vi. 33.

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Relative position of Christianity and Paganism.

poses of Christian worship, and the gradual erection of large churches in many of the Eastern cities, Christianity began to assume an outward form and dignity commensurate with its secret moral influence. In imposing magnitude, if not in the grace and magnificence of its architecture, it rivalled the temples of antiquity. But as yet it had neither the power, nor, probably, the inclination, to array itself in the spoils of Paganism. Its aggression was still rather that of fair competition, than of hostile destruction. It was content to behold the silent courts of the Pagan fanes untrodden but by a few casual worshippers; altars without victims, thin wreaths of smoke rising where the air used to be clouded with the reek of hecatombs; the priesthood murmuring in bitter envy at the throngs which passed by the porticoes of their temples towards the Christian church. The direct interference with the freedom of Pagan worship seems to have been confined to the suppression of some of those Eastern rites which were offensive to public morals. Some of the Syrian temples retained the obscene ceremonial of the older Nature worship. Religious prostitution, and other monstrous enormities, appeared under the form of divine adoration. The same rites, which had endangered the fidelity of the ancient Israelites, shocked the severe purity of the Christians. A temple in Syria of the female principle of generation, which the later Greeks identified with their Aphrodite, was defiled by these unspeakable pollutions; it was levelled to the ground by the Emperor's command; the re-

Temples suppressed.

cesses of the sacred grove laid open to the day, and the rites interdicted.* A temple of Æsculapius at Ægæ in Cilicia fell under the same proscription. The miraculous cures, pretended to be wrought in this temple, where the suppliants passed the night, appear to have excited the jealousy of the Christians; and this was, perhaps, the first overt act of hostility against the established Paganism.† In many other places the frauds of the priesthood were detected by the zealous incredulity of the Christians; and Polytheism, feebly defended by its own party, at least left to its fate by the government, assailed on all quarters by an active and persevering enemy, endured affront, exposure, neglect, if not with the dignified patience of martyrdom, with the sullen equanimity of indifference.

Palestine itself, and its capital, Jerusalem, was an open province, of which Christianity took entire and almost undisputed possession. Paganism, in the adjacent regions, had built some of its most splendid temples; the later Roman architecture at Gerasa, at Petra, and at Baalbec, appears built on the massive and enormous foundations of the older native structures. But in Palestine proper it had made no strong settlement. Temples had been raised by Hadrian, in his new city, on the site of Jerusalem. One dedicated to Aphrodite occupied the spot, which Christian tradition or later invention asserted to be the sepulchre of Christ.‡

* Euseb. Vit. Const. iii. 55.

† Ibid. iii. 56.

‡ This temple was improbably said to have been built on this spot by Hadrian to insult the Christians; but Hadrian's hostility was against the rebellious Jews, not against the Christians.

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Christianity at Jerusalem.

The prohibition issued by Hadrian against the admission of the Jews into the Holy City, doubtless was no longer enforced; but, though not forcibly depressed by public authority, Judaism itself waned, in its own native territory, before the ascendancy of Christianity.

It was in Palestine that the change which had been slowly working into Christianity itself, began to assume a more definite and apparent form. The religion, re-issued as it were from its cradle, in a character, if foreign to its original simplicity, singularly adapted to achieve and maintain its triumph over the human mind. It no longer confined itself to its purer moral influence; it was no more a simple, spiritual faith, despising all those accessories which captivate the senses, and feed the imagination with new excitement. It no longer disdained the local sanctuary, nor stood independent of those associations with place, which became an universal and spiritual religion. It began to have its hero-worship, its mythology; and to crowd the mind with images, of a secondary degree of sanctity, but which enthralled and kept in captivity those who were not ripe for the pure moral conception of the Deity, and the impersonation of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. It was, as might not unreasonably be anticipated, a female, the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, who gave, as it were, this new colouring to Christian devotion. In Palestine indeed, where her pious activity was chiefly employed, it was the memory of the Redeemer himself which hallowed the scenes of

his life and death to the imagination of the believer. Splendid churches arose over the place of his birth at Bethlehem; that of his burial, near the supposed Calvary; that of his ascension on the Mount of Olives. So far the most spiritual piety could not hesitate to proceed; to such natural and irresistible claims upon its veneration no Christian heart could refuse to yield. The cemeteries of their brethren had, from the commencement of Christianity, exercised a strong influence over the imagination. They had frequently, in times of trial, been the only places of religious assemblage. When hallowed to the feelings by the remains of friends, of bishops, of martyrs, it was impossible to approach them without the profoundest reverence; and the transition from reverence to veneration, to adoration, was too easy and imperceptible to awaken the jealousy of that exclusive devotion due to God and the Redeemer. The sanctity of the place where the Redeemer was supposed to have been laid in the sepulchre, was still more naturally and intimately associated with the purest sentiments of devotion.

But the next step, the discovery of the true cross, was more important. It materialised, at once, the spiritual worship of Christianity. It was reported throughout wondering Christendom, that tradition or a vision, having revealed the place of the Holy Sepulchre, the fane of Venus had been thrown down by the imperial command, excavations had been made, the Holy Sepulchre had come to light, and with the Sepulchre three crosses, with the in-

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scription originally written by Pilate in three languages over that of Jesus. As it was doubtful to which of the crosses the tablet with the inscription belonged, a miracle decided to the perplexed believers the claims of the genuine cross.* The precious treasure was divided; part, enshrined in a silver case, remained at Jerusalem, from whence pilgrims constantly bore fragments of the still vegetating wood to the West, till enough was accumulated in the different churches to build a ship of war. Part was sent to Constantinople: the nails of the passion of Christ were turned into a bit for the war-horse of the Emperor, or, according to another account, represented the rays of the sun around the head of his statue.

Churches built in Palestine.

A magnificent church, called at first the Church of the Resurrection (Anastasis), afterwards that of the Holy Sepulchre, rose on the sacred spot, hallowed by this discovery; in which from that time a large part of the Christian world has addressed its unquestioning orisons. It stood in a large open court, with porticoes on each side, with the usual porch, nave, and choir. The nave was inlaid with precious marbles; and the roof, overlaid with gold, showered down a flood of light over the whole building; the roofs of the aisles were likewise overlaid with gold. At the farther end arose a dome supported

* The excited state of the Christian mind, and the tendency to this materialisation of Christianity, may be estimated by the undoubting credulity with which they entertained the improbable notion, that the crosses were buried with our Saviour, not only that on which he suffered, but those of the two thieves also. From the simple account of the burial in the Gospels, how singular a change to that of the discovery of the cross in the ecclesiastical historians. Socrates, i. 17. Sozomen, ii. 1. Theodoret, i. 18.

by twelve pillars, in commemoration of the Twelve Apostles; the capitals of these were silver vases. Within the church was another court, at the extremity of which stood the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, lavishly adorned with gold and precious stones, as it were to perpetuate the angelic glory which streamed forth on the day of the Resurrection.*

Another sacred place was purified by the command of Constantine, and dedicated to Christian worship. Near Hebron there was the celebrated oak or terebinth tree of Mambre, which tradition pointed out as the spot where the angels appeared to Abraham. It is singular that the Heathen are said to have celebrated religious rites at this place, and to have worshipped the celestial visitants of Abraham. It was likewise, as usual in the East, a celebrated emporium of commerce. The worship may have been like that at the Caaba of Mecca before the appearance of Mahomet, for the fame of Abraham seems to have been preserved among the Syrian and Arabian tribes, as well as the Jews. It is remarkable that, at a later period, the Jews and Christians are said to have met in amicable devotion, and offered their common incense and suspended their lights in the church erected over this spot by the Christian Emperor.†

* Eusebius, Vit. Constant. iii. 29. et seq.; this seems to be the sense of the author.

† Antoninus in Itinerario. See Heinichen; Note on Euseb. Vit. Const. iii. 53.

CHAPTER IV.

TRINITARIAN CONTROVERSY.

Trinitarian controversy.

BUT it was as arbiter of religious differences, as presiding in their solemn councils, that Constantine appeared to the Christians the avowed and ostensible head of their community. Immediately after his victory over Licinius, Constantine had found the East, no less than the West, agitated by the dissensions of his Christian subjects. He had hoped to allay the flames of the Donatist schism, by the consentient and impartial authority of the Western churches. A more extensive, if as yet less fiercely agitated, contest disturbed the Eastern provinces. Outward peace seemed to be restored only to give place to intestine dissension. We must reascend the course of our History for several years, in order to trace in one continuous narrative the rise and progress of the Trinitarian Controversy. This dissension had broken out soon after Constantine's subjugation of the East; already, before the building of Constantinople, it had obtained full possession of the public mind, and the great Council of Nice, the first real senate of Christendom, had passed its solemn decree. The Donatist schism was but a local dissension: it raged, indeed, with fatal and implacable fury; but it was almost entirely confined to the

limits of a single province. The Trinitarian controversy was the first dissension which rent asunder the whole body of the Christians, arrayed in almost every part of the world two hostile parties in implacable opposition, and, at a later period, exercised a powerful political influence on the affairs of the world. How singular an illustration of the change already wrought in the mind of man by the introduction of Christianity. Questions which, if they had arisen in the earlier period of the world, would have been limited to a priestly caste; if in Greece, would have been confined to the less frequented schools of Athens or Alexandria, and might have produced some intellectual excitement among the few who were conversant with the higher philosophy; now agitated the populace of great cities, and occupied the councils of princes; and, at a later period, determined the fate of kingdoms and the sovereignty of great part of Europe.* It appears still more extraordinary, since this controversy related to a purely speculative tenet. The disputants of either party might possibly have asserted the superior tendency of each system to enforce the severity of Christian morals, or to excite the ardour of Christian piety; but they appear to have dwelt little, if at all, on the practical effects of the conflicting opinions. In morals, in manners, in habits, in usages, in church-government, in religious ceremonial, there was no distinction between the parties

* For instance, when the savage orthodoxy of the Franks made the more refined Arianism of the Visigoths a pretext for hostile invasion.

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which divided Christendom. The Gnostic sects inculcated a severer asceticism, and differed, in many of their usages, from the general body of the Christians: the Donatist factions commenced at least with a question of church discipline, and almost grew into a strife for political ascendancy: the Arians and Athanasians first divided the world on a pure question of faith. From this period we may date the introduction of rigorous articles of belief, which required the submissive assent of the mind to every word and letter of an established creed, and which raised the slightest heresy of opinion into a more fatal offence against God, and a more odious crime in the estimation of man, than the worst moral delinquency, or the most flagrant deviation from the spirit of Christianity.

Origin of the controversy.

The Trinitarian controversy was the natural, though tardy, growth of the Gnostic opinions: it could scarcely be avoided when the exquisite distinctness and subtlety of the Greek language were applied to religious opinions of an Oriental origin. Even the Greek of the New Testament retained something of the significant and reverential vagueness of Eastern expression. This vagueness, even philosophically speaking, may better convey to the mind those mysterious conceptions of the Deity which are beyond the province of reason, than the anatomical precision of philosophic Greek. The first Christians were content to worship, with undefining fervour, the Deity as revealed in the Gospel. They assented to, and repeated with devout adoration, the words of the Sacred Writings, or those which had been made use of from the

Apostolic age; but they did not decompose them, or, with nice and scrupulous accuracy, appropriate peculiar terms to each manifestation of the Godhead. It was the great characteristic of the Oriental theologies, as described in a former chapter, to preserve the primal and parental Deity at the greatest possible distance from the material creation. This originated in the elementary tenet of the irreclaimable evil of matter. In the present day, the more rational believer labours under the constant dread, if not of materialising, of humanising too much the Great Supreme. A certain degree of indistinctness appears inseparable from that vastness of conception, which arises out of the more extended knowledge of the works of the Creator. A more expanding and comprehensive philosophy increases the distance between the Omnific First Cause and the race of man. All that defines seems to limit and circumscribe the Deity. Yet in thus reverentially repelling the Deity into an unapproachable sphere, and investing him, as it were, in a nature absolutely unimaginable by the mind; in thus secluding him from the degradation of being vulgarised, if the expression may be ventured, by profane familiarity, or circumscribed by the narrowness of the human intellect, God is gradually subtilised and sublimated into a being beyond the reach of devotional feelings, almost superior to adoration. There is in mankind, and in the individual man, on the one hand, an intellectual tendency to refine the Deity into a mental conception; and, on the other, an instinctive counter-tendency to impersonate him

Constant struggle between the intellectual and devotional conception of the Deity.

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into a material, and, when the mind is ruder and less intellectual, a mere human being. Among the causes which have contributed to the successful promulgation of Christianity, and the maintenance of its influence over the mind of man, was the singular beauty and felicity with which its theory of the conjunction of the divine and human nature, each preserving its separate attributes, on the one hand, enabled the mind to preserve inviolate the pure conception of the Deity, on the other, to approximate it, as it were, to human interests and sympathies. But this is done rather by a process of instinctive feeling than by strict logical reasoning. Even here, there is a perpetual strife between the intellect, which guards with jealousy the divine conception of the Redeemer's nature; and the sentiment, or even the passion, which so draws down the general notion to its own capacities, so approximates and assimilates it to its own ordinary sympathies, as to absorb the Godhead in the human nature.

The Gnostic systems had universally admitted the seclusion of the primal Deity from all intercourse with matter; that intercourse had taken place, through a derivative and intermediate being, more or less remotely proceeding from the sole fountain of Godhead. This, however, was not the part of Gnosticism, which was chiefly obnoxious to the general sentiments of the Christian body. Their theories about the malignant nature of the Creator; the identification of the God of the Jews with this hostile being; the Docetism which asserted the

unreality of the Redeemer — these points, with their whole system of the origin of the worlds and of mankind, excited the most vigorous and active resistance. But when the wilder theories of Gnosticism began to die away, or to rank themselves under the hostile standard of Manicheism; when their curious cosmogonical notions were dismissed, and the greater part of the Christian world began to agree in the plain doctrines of the eternal supremacy of God; the birth, the death, the resurrection of Christ, as the Son of God; the effusion of the Holy Spirit, — questions began to arise as to the peculiar nature and relation between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In all the systems a binary, in most a triple, modification of the Deity was admitted. The Logos, the Divine Word or Reason, might differ, in the various schemes, in its relation to the parental Divinity and to the universe; but it had this distinctive and ineffaceable character, that it was the Mediator, the connecting link between the unseen and unapproachable world and that of man. This Platonism, if it may be so called, was universal. It differed, indeed, widely in most systems from the original philosophy of the Athenian sage; it had acquired a more Oriental and imaginative cast. Plato's poetry of words had been expanded into the poetry of conceptions. It may be doubted whether Plato himself impersonated the Logos, the Word or Reason, of the Deity; with him it was rather an attribute of the Godhead. In one sense it was the chief of these archetypal ideas, according to which the Creator framed the

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universe; in another, the principle of life, motion, and harmony which pervaded all things. This Platonism had gradually absorbed all the more intellectual class; it hovered over, as it were, and gathered under its wings all the religions of the world. It had already modified Judaism; it had allied itself with the Syrian and Mithriac worship of the Sun, the visible Mediator, the emblem of the Word; it was part of the general Nature worship; it was attempting to renew Paganism, and was the recognised and leading tenet in the higher Mysteries. Disputes on the nature of Christ were indeed coeval with the promulgation of Christianity. Some of the Jewish converts had never attained to the sublimer notion of his mediatorial character; but this disparaging notion, adverse to the ardent zeal of the rest of the Christian world, had isolated this sect. The imperfect Christianity of the Ebionites had long ago expired in an obscure corner of Palestine. In all the other divisions of Christianity, the Christ had more or less approximated to the office and character of this being, which connected mankind with the Eternal Father.

Controversy commences at Alexandria.

Alexandria, the fatal and prolific soil of speculative controversy, where speculative controversy was most likely to madden into furious and lasting hostility, gave birth to this new element of disunion in the Christian world. The Trinitarian question, indeed, had already been agitated within a less extensive sphere. Noetus, an Asiatic, either of Smyrna or Ephesus, had dwelt with such exclusive zeal on the unity of the Godhead, as to absorb,

Noetus.

as it were, the whole Trinity into one undivided and undistinguished Being. The one supreme and impassible Father united to himself the man Jesus, whom he had created, by so intimate a conjunction, that the divine unity was not destroyed. His adversaries drew the conclusion, that, according to this blaspheming theory, the Father must have suffered on the cross, and the ignominious name of Patripassians adhered to the few followers of this unprosperous sect.

Sabellianism.

Sabellianism had excited more attention. Sabellius was an African of the Cyrenaic province. According to his system it was the same Deity, under different forms, who existed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. A more modest and unoffending Sabellianism might, perhaps, be imagined in accordance with modern philosophy. The manifestations of the same Deity, or rather of his attributes, through which alone the Godhead becomes comprehensible to the human mind, may have been thus successively made in condescension to our weakness of intellect. It would be the same Deity, assuming, as it were, an objective form, so as to come within the scope of the human mind; a real difference, as regards the conception of man, perfect unity in its subjective existence. This, however, though some of its terms may appear the same with the Sabellianism of antiquity, would be the Trinitarianism of a philosophy unknown at this period. The language of the Sabellians implied, to the jealous ears of their opponents, that the distinction between the persons of the Trinity was altogether

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unreal. While the Sabellian party charged their adversaries with a Heathen Tritheistic worship, they retorted by accusing Sabellianism of annihilating the separate existence of the Son and the Holy Ghost. But Sabellianism had not divided Christianity into two irreconcileable parties. Even now, but for the commanding characters of the champions who espoused each party, the Trinitarian controversy might have been limited to a few provinces, and become extinct in some years. But it arose, not merely under the banners of men endowed with those abilities which command the multitude; it not merely called into action the energies of successive disputants, the masters of the intellectual attainments of the age,—it appeared at a critical period, when the rewards of success were more splendid, the penalty upon failure proportionately more severe. The contest was now not merely for a superiority over a few scattered and obscure communities, it was agitated on a vaster theatre, that of the Roman world; the proselytes whom it disputed were sovereigns; it contested the supremacy of the human mind, which was now bending to the yoke of Christianity. It is but judging on the common principles of human nature to conclude, that the grandeur of the prize supported the ambition and inflamed the passions of the contending parties, that human motives of political power and aggrandisement mingled with the more spiritual influences of the love of truth, and zeal for the purity of religion.

The doctrine of the Trinity, that is, the divine

nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, was acknowledged by all. To each of these distinct and separate beings, both parties ascribed the attributes of the Godhead, with the exception of self-existence, which was restricted by the Arians to the Father. Both admitted the anti-mundane Being of the Son and the Holy Spirit. But, according to the Arian, there was a time, before the commencement of the ages, when the Parent Deity dwelt alone in undeveloped, undivided unity. At this time, immeasurably, incalculably, inconceivably remote, the majestic solitude ceased, the divine unity was broken by an act of the sovereign Will, and the only begotten Son, the image of the Father, the Vicegerent of all the divine power, the intermediate Agent in all the long subsequent work of creation, *began to be.**

Such was the question which led to all the evils of human strife — hatred, persecution, bloodshed. But, however profoundly humiliating this fact in the history of mankind, and in the history of Christianity an epoch of complete revolution from its genuine spirit, it may fairly be inquired, whether this was not an object more generous, more unselfish, and at least as wise, as many of those motives of personal and national advantage and aggrandisement, or many of those magic words, which, embraced by two parties with blind and unintelligent fury, have led to many of the most disastrous and sanguinary events in the annals of man.

* Compare the letter of Arius, in Theodoret, lib. i. c. v.

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It might, indeed, have been supposed that a profound metaphysical question of this kind, would have been far removed from the passions of the multitude; but with the multitude, and that multitude often comprehends nearly the whole of society, it is the passion which seeks the object, not the object which, of its own exciting influence, inflames the passion. In fact religion was become the one dominant passion of the whole Christian world, and every thing allied to it, or rather, in this case, which seemed to concern its very essence, could no longer be agitated with tranquillity, or debated with indifference. The Pagan party, miscalculating the inherent strength of the Christian system, saw, no doubt, in these disputes the seeds of the destruction of Christianity. The contest was brought on the stage at Alexandria *; but there was no Aristophanes, or rather the serious and unpoetic time could not have produced an Aristophanes, who might at once show that he understood, while he broadly ridiculed, the follies of his adversaries. The days even of a Lucian were past. † Discord, which at times is fatal to a nation or to a sect, seems at others, by the animating excitement of rivalry, the stirring collision of hostile energy, to favour the development of moral strength. The Christian republic, like Rome when it was rent asunder by domestic factions, calmly proceeded in her conquest of the world.

* Euseb. Vit. Constant. ii. 61. Socrates, i. 6.

† The Philopatris, of whatever age it may be, is clearly not Lucian's; and, at most, only slightly touches these questions.

The plain and intelligible principle which united the opponents of Arius was, no doubt, a vague, and, however perhaps overstrained, neither ungenerous nor unnatural jealousy, lest the dignity of the Redeemer, the object of their grateful adoration, might in some way be lowered by the new hypothesis. The divinity of the Saviour seemed inseparably connected with his co-equality with the Father; it was endangered by the slightest concession on this point. It was their argument, that if the Son was not coeval in existence with the Father, he must have been created, and created out of that which was not pre-existent. But a created being must be liable to mutability; and it was asserted in the public address of the Patriarch of Alexandria, that this fatal consequence had been extorted from an unguarded Arian, if not from Arius himself, — that it was *possible* that the Son might have fallen, like the great rebellious angel.*

Alexander, Patriarch of Alexandria.

The patriarch of this important see, the metropolis of Egypt, was named Alexander. It was said that Arius, a presbyter of acute powers of reasoning, popular address, and blameless character, had declined that episcopal dignity.† The person of Arius‡ was tall and graceful; his countenance

Arius.

* Epiphan. Hær. 69. tom. i. p. 723—727.

† See Philostorgius (the Arian writer). Theodoret, on the other hand, says, that he brought forward his opinions from envy at the promotion of Alexander, i. 2. See the Epistle of Alexander, in Socrat. Hist. Eccl. 1, 6.

‡ Arius is said, in his early life, to have been implicated in the sect of the Meletians, which seems to have been rather a party than a sect. They were the followers of Meletius, Bishop of Lycopolis, who had been deposed for having sacrificed during the persecution. Yet this sect or party lasted for more than a century.

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calm, pale, and subdued; his manners engaging; his conversation fluent and persuasive. He was well acquainted with human sciences; as a disputant subtle, ingenious, and fertile in resources. His enemies add to this character, which themselves have preserved, that this humble and mortified exterior concealed unmeasured ambition; that his simplicity, frankness, and honesty only veiled his craft and love of intrigue; that he appeared to stand aloof from all party, merely that he might guide his cabal with more perfect command, and agitate and govern the hearts of men. Alexander was accustomed, whether for the instruction of the people, or the display of his own powers, to debate in public these solemn questions on the nature of the Deity, and the relation of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father. According to the judgment of Arius, Alexander fell inadvertently into the heresy of Sabellianism, and was guilty of confounding in the simple unity of the Godhead the existence of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.*

The intemperate indignation of Alexander at the objections of Arius, betrayed more of the baffled disputant, or the wounded pride of the dignitary, than the serenity of the philosopher, or the meekness of the Christian. He armed himself ere long in all the terrors of his office, and promulgated his anathema in terms full of exaggeration and violence. "The impious Arius, the forerunner of Antichrist, had dared to utter his blasphemies against the divine Redeemer." Arius, expelled from Alexandria, not indeed before

* Socrates, i. 5, 6.

his opinions had spread through the whole of Egypt and Libya*, retired to the more congenial atmosphere of Syria.† There, his vague theory caught the less severely reasoning, and more imaginative minds of the Syrian bishops‡: the lingering Orientalism prepared them for this kindred hypothesis. The most learned, the most pious, the most influential, united themselves to his party. The chief of these were the two prelates named

* The account of Sozomen says, that Alexander at first vacillated, but that he afterwards commanded Arius to adopt his opinions: τὸν Ἄρειον ὁμοίως φρονεῖν ἐκέλευσε. Sozomen acknowledges the high character of many of the Arian bishops; πλείστους ἀγαθοῦ βίου προσχήματι σεμνοὺς, καὶ πιθανότητι λόγου δεινοὺς, συλλαμβανομένους τοῖς ἀμφὶ τὸν Ἄρειον.

† It was during his retreat that he wrote his famous Thalia, the gay and convivial title of which is singularly out of keeping with the grave and serious questions then in agitation. His adversaries represent this as a poem full of profane wit, and even of indecency. It was written in the same measure, and to the same air, with the Sotadic verses, which were proverbial for their grossness even among the Greeks. It is difficult to reconcile this account of the Thalia with the subtle and politic character which his enemies attribute to Arius, still less to the protection of such men as Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the other Syrian prelates. Arius, likewise, composed hymns, in accordance with his opinions, to be chaunted by sailors, those who worked at the mill, or travellers. Songs of this kind abounded in the Greek poetry; each art and trade had its song[1], and Arius may have intended no more than to turn this popular practice in favour of Christianity, by substituting sacred for profane songs, which, of course, would be embued with his own opinions. Might not the Thalia have been written in the same vein, and something in the same spirit with which a celebrated modern humorist and preacher adapted hymns to some of the most popular airs, and declared that the devil ought not to have all the best tunes. The general style of Arius is said to have been soft, effeminate, and popular. The specimen from the Thalia (in Athanas, Or. i. Cont. Ar. c. 5.) is very loose and feeble Greek. Yet it is admitted that he was an expert dialectician; and no weak orator would have maintained so long such a contest.

‡ The bishops of Ptolemais, in the Pentapolis, and Theonas of Marmarica, joined his party. The females were inclined to his side. Seven hundred virgins of Alexandria, and of the Mareotic nome, owned him for their spiritual teacher. Compare the letter of Alexander in Theodoret. ch. iv.

[1] Ilgen, de Scoliorum Poesi, p. xiii.

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Eusebius, — one the ecclesiastical historian, the other, bishop of the important city of Nicomedia. Throughout the East, the controversy was propagated with earnest rapidity. It was not repressed by the attempts of Licinius to interrupt the free intercourse between the Christian communities, and his prohibition of the ecclesiastical synods. The ill smothered flame burst into tenfold fury on the re-union of the East to the empire of Constantine. The interference of the Emperor was loudly demanded to allay the strife which distracted the Christendom of the East. The behaviour of Constantine was regulated by the most perfect equanimity, or, more probably, guided by some counsellor of mild and more humane Christianity: his letter of peace was, in its spirit, a model of temper and conciliation. * With profound sorrow he had heard that his designs for the unity of the empire, achieved by his victory over Licinius, as well as for the unity of the faith, had been disturbed by this unexpected contest. His impartial rebuke condemned Alexander for unnecessarily agitating such frivolous and unimportant questions, and Arius for not suppressing, in prudent and respectful silence, his objections to the doctrine of the Patriarch. It recommended the judicious reserve of the philosophers, who had never debated such subjects before an ignorant and uneducated audience, and who differed without acrimony on such profound questions. He entreated them, by the unanimous suppression of all feelings of unhallowed animosity, to restore his cheerful days and undis-

Letter of Constantine.

* See the letter in Euseb. Vit. Constant. ii. 64—72.

turbed nights. Of the same faith, the same form of worship, they ought to meet in amicable synod, to adore their common God in peaceful harmony, and not fall into discord as to accuracy of expression on these most minute of questions; to enjoy and allow freedom in the sanctuary of their own minds, but to remain united in the common bonds of Christian love.*

It is probable that the hand of Hosius, bishop of Cordova in Spain, is to be traced in that royal and Christian letter. The influence of Hosius was uniformly exercised in this manner. Wherever the edicts of the government were mild, conciliating, and humane, we find the Bishop of Cordova. It is by no means an improbable conjecture of Tillemont, that he was the Spaniard who afterwards, in the hour of mental agony and remorse, administered to the Emperor the balm of Christian penitence.

Hosius was sent to Egypt, as the imperial Commissioner, to assuage the animosity of the distracted church. But religious strife, in Egypt more particularly, its natural and prolific soil, refused to listen to the admonitions of Christian wisdom or imperial authority. Eusebius compares the fierce conflict of parties — bishops with bishops, people with people—to the collision of the Symplegades.† From the mouths of the Nile to the Cataracts, the

* Ἅ δ' ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐλαχίστων τούτων ζητήσεων ἐν ἀλλήλοις ἀκριβολογεῖσθε, κἂν μὴ πρὸς μιὰν γνώμην συμφέρησθε, μίνειν ἔσω λογισμοῦ προσήκει, τῷ τῆς διανοίας ἀπορρήτῳ τηρούμενοι. Euseb. Vit. Const. ii. 71.

† Vit. Const. iii. 4.

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divided population tumultuously disputed the nature of the divine unity.*

Council of Nice.

A general council of the heads of the various Christian communities throughout the Roman empire was summoned by the imperial mandate, to establish, on the consentient authority of assembled Christendom, the true doctrine on these contested points, and to allay for ever this propensity to hostile disputation. The same paramount tribunal was to settle definitively another subordinate question, relating to the time of keeping the Easter festival. Many of the eastern communities shocked their more scrupulous brethren by following the calculations, and observing the same sacred days with the impious and abhorred Jews; for the further we advance in the Christian history, the estrangement of the Christians from the Jews darkens more and more into absolute antipathy.

Controversy about keeping Easter.

A. D. 325.

In the month of May or June (the 20th†) in the year 325, met the great council of Nice. Not half a century before, the Christian bishops had been only marked as the objects of the most cruel insult and persecution. They had been chosen, on account of their eminence in their own communities, as the peculiar victims of the stern policy of the government. They had been driven into exile, set to work in the mines, exposed to every kind of humiliation and suffering, from which some had

* Ἔριδες ἐν ἑκάστῃ πόλει καὶ κώμῃ, καὶ μάχαι περὶ τῶν θείων δογμάτων ἐγίγνοντο. Theodoret. i. 6.

† One of these dates rests on the authority of Socrates, xiii. 26.; the other of the Paschal Chronicle, p. 282. Compare Pagi, p. 404.

in mercy been released by death. They now assembled, under the imperial sanction, a religious senate from all parts at least of the eastern world, for Italy was represented only by two presbyters of Rome; Hosius appeared for Spain, Gaul, and Britain. The spectacle was altogether new to the world. No wide-ruling sovereign would ever have thought of summoning a conclave of the sacerdotal orders of the different religions; a synod of philosophers to debate some grave metaphysical or even political question was equally inconsistent with the ordinary usages and sentiments of Grecian or Roman society. CHAP. IV.

The public establishment of post-horses was commanded to afford every facility, and that gratuitously, for the journey of the assembling bishops.* Vehicles or mules were to be provided, as though the assembly were an affair of state, at the public charge. At a later period, when councils became more frequent, the Heathen historian complains, that the public service was impeded, and the post-horses harassed and exhausted by the incessant journeying to and fro of the Christian delegates to their councils. They were sumptuously maintained during the sitting at the public charge.†

Above three hundred bishops were present, presbyters, deacons, acolyths without number‡, a considerable body of laity: but it was the presence of the Number of bishops present.

* Euseb. Vit. Const. iii. 6. Theodoret. i. 7.

† Euseb. iii. 9.

‡ There was one bishop from Persia, one from Scythia. Eusebius states the number at 250; that in the text is on the authority of Theodoret, and of the numbers said to have signed the creed.

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Emperor himself which gave its chief weight and dignity to the assembly. Nothing could so much confirm the Christians in the opinion of their altered position, or declare to the world at large the growing power of Christianity, as this avowed interest taken in their domestic concerns; or so tend to raise the importance attached even to the more remote and speculative doctrines of the new faith, as this unprecedented condescension, so it would seem to the Heathen, on the part of the Emperor. The council met, probably, in a spacious basilica.* Eusebius describes the scene as himself deeply impressed with its solemnity. The assembly sate in profound silence, while the great officers of state and other dignified persons (there was no armed guard) entered the hall, and awaited in proud and trembling expectation the appearance of the Emperor of the world in a Christian council. Constantine at length entered; he was splendidly attired; the eyes of the bishops were dazzled by the gold and precious stones upon his raiment. The majesty of his person and the modest dignity of his demeanour heightened the effect: the whole assembly rose to do him honour; he advanced to a low golden seat prepared for him, and did not take his seat (it is difficult not to suspect Eusebius of highly colouring the deference of the Emperor,) till a sign of permission had been given by the

First meetings of the council.

* There is a long note in Heinichen's Eusebius to prove that they did not meet in the palace, but in a church; as though the authority of their proceedings depended upon their place of assembly. It was probably a basilica, or hall of justice; the kind of building usually made over by the government for the purposes of Christian worship; and, in general, the model of the earliest Christian edifices.

bishops.* One of the leading prelates (probably Eusebius the historian) commenced the proceedings with a short address, and a hymn to the Almighty God. Constantine then delivered an exhortation to unity in the Latin language, which was interpreted to the Greek bishops. His admonition seems at first to have produced no great effect. Mutual accusation, defence, and recrimination prolonged the debate.† Constantine seems to have been present during the greater part of the sittings, listening with patience, softening asperities, countenancing those whose language tended to peace and union, and conversing familiarly, in the best Greek he could command, with the different prelates. The courtly flattery of the council might attribute to Constantine himself what was secretly suggested by the Bishop of Cordova. For powerful and comprehensive as his mind may have been, it is incredible that a man so educated, and engaged during the early period of his life with military and civil affairs, could have entered, particularly being imperfectly acquainted with the Greek language, into these discussions on religious metaphysics.

Behaviour of Constantine.

The council sate for rather more than two months.‡ Towards the close, Constantine, on the occasion of the commencement of the twentieth

* Οὐ πρότερον ἢ τοὺς ἐπισκόπους ἐπινεῦσαι. See also Socrates, i. 8. In Theodoret (i. 7.), this has grown into his humbly asking permission to sit down.

† Constantine burned the libels which the bishops had presented against each other. Many of these (the ecclesiastical historian intimates) arose out of private animosities. Socrates, i. 6.

‡ According to some, two months and eleven days, to others, two months and six days.

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year of his reign*, condescended to invite the bishops to a sumptuous banquet. All attended, and as they passed through the imperial guard, treated with every mark of respect, they could not but call to mind the total revolution in their circumstances. Eusebius betrays his transport by the acknowledgment that they could scarcely believe that it was a reality, not a vision; to the grosser conception of those who had not purified their minds from the millennial notions, the banquet seemed the actual commencement of the kingdom of Christ.

Nicene creed.

The Nicene creed was the result of the solemn deliberation of the assembly. It was conceived with some degree of oriental indefiniteness, harmonised with Grecian subtlety of expression. The vague and somewhat imaginative fulness of its original eastern terms was not too severely limited by the fine precision of its definitions. One fatal word broke the harmony of assent with which it was received by the whole council. Christ was declared Homoousios, of the same *substance* with the Father †, and the undeniable, if perhaps inevitable ambiguity of this single term, involved Christianity in centuries of hostility. To one party it

* This seems to reconcile the difficulty stated by Heinichen. The 20th year of Constantine's reign began the 8th Cal. Aug. A.D. 325. Eusebius uses the inaccurate word ἐπληροῦτο. Vit. Const. iii. 14.

† Athanasius himself allowed that the bishops who deposed Paul, of Samosata, were justified in rejecting the word ὁμοούσιον, because they understood it in a material or corporeal sense. But the privilege allowed to those who had died in orthodox reputation was denied to the Arians, and semi-Arians: de Synodis, Athanas. Oper. i. p. 759. It is impossible to read some pages of this treatise without the unpleasant conviction, that Athanasius was determined to make out the Arians to be in the wrong.

implied absolute identity, and was therefore only ill-disguised Sabellianism; to the other it was essential to the co-equal and co-eval dignity of the three persons in the Godhead. To some of the Syrian bishops it implied or countenanced the material notion of the Deity.* It was, it is said by one ecclesiastical historian, a battle in the night, in which neither party could see the meaning of the other.†

Three hundred and eighteen bishops confirmed this creed by their signatures; five alone still contested the single expression, the Homoousion: Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nice, Theonas of Marmarica, Maris of Chalcedon, and Eusebius of Cæsarea. Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis were banished. Eusebius of Cæsarea, after much hesitation, consented to subscribe, but sent the creed into his diocese with a comment, explanatory of the sense in which he understood the contested

Five recusants.

* Μήτε γὰρ δύνασθαι τὴν αὔλον καὶ νοέραν καὶ ἀσώματον φύσιν, σωμάτικόν τι πάθος ὑφίστασθαι. This is the language of Eusebius.

Φασὶ δὲ ὅμως περὶ τούτου, ὡς ἄρα θέλων ὁ Θεὸς τὴν γεννητὴν κτίσαι φύσιν, ἐπειδὴ ἐώρα μὴ δυναμένην αὐτὴν μετασχεῖν τῆς τοῦ πατρὸς ἀκράτου, καὶ τῆς παρ' αὐτοῦ δημιουργίας, ποιεῖ καὶ κτίζει πρώτως μόνος μόνον ἕνα, καὶ καλεῖ τοῦτον υἱὸν καὶ λόγον, ἵνα τούτου μέσου γενομένου, οὕτως λοιπὸν καὶ τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι δυνηθῇ. ταῦτα οὐ μόνον εἰρήκασιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γράψαι τετολμήκασιν Εὐσέβιός τε, καὶ Ἄρειος καὶ ὁ Φύσας Ἀστέριος. Athan. Orat. ii. c. 24. Compare Möhler (a learned and strongly orthodox Roman Catholic writer), Athanasius der Grösse, b. i. p. 195. Möhler but dimly sees the Gnostic or Oriental origin of this notion, which lies at the bottom of Arianism.

† This remarkable sentence does credit to the judgment and impartiality of Socrates: Νυκτομαχίας δὲ οὐδὲν ἀπεῖχε τὰ γιγνομένα, οὐτὲ γὰρ ἀλλήλους ἐφαίνοντο νοοῦντες, ἀφ' ὧν ἀλλήλους βλασφημεῖν ὑπελάμβανον· οἱ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ὁμοουσίου τὴν λέξιν ἐκκλίνοντες τὴν Σαβελλίου καὶ Μοντανοῦ δόξαν εἰσηγεῖσθαι αὐτὴν τοὺς προσδεχομένους ἐνόμιζον· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο βλασφήμους ἐκάλουν, ὡς ἀναιροῦντες τὴν ὕπαρξιν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ· οἱ δὲ πάλιν τῷ ὁμοουσίῳ προσκείμενοι πολυθεΐαν εἰσάγειν τοὺς ἑτέρους νομίζοντες, ὡς Ἑλληνισμὸν εἰσαγόντας ἐξετράποντο. C. 23.

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word. His chief care was to guard against giving the slightest countenance to the material conception of the Deity. Two only withstood with uncompromising resistance the decree of the council. The solemn anathema of this Christian senate was pronounced against Arius and his adherents; they were banished by the civil power, and they were especially interdicted from disturbing the peace of Alexandria by their presence.*

Banishment of Arius.

Peace might seem to be restored; the important question set at rest by the united authority of the Emperor, and a representative body which might fairly presume to deliver the sentiments of the whole Christian world. But the Arians were condemned, not convinced; discomfited, not subdued.† Rather more than two years elapsed, eventful in the private life of Constantine, but tranquil in the history of the Christian church. The imperial assessor in the Christian council had appeared in the West under a different character, as the murderer of his son and of his wife. He returned to the East, determined no more to visit the imperial city, where, instead of the humble deference with which all parties courted his approbation, he had been unable to close his ears against the audacious and bitter pasquinade which arraigned his cruelty to his own family. His return to the East, instead of over-

* In one passage in the De Synodis, Athanasius accused not only the Arian but the semi-Arian party, Eusebius as well as Arius, of something like Socinianism. Ὡς ἐστιν υἱὸς ὅμοιος πάτρι, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν δόγματων καὶ τῆς διδασκαλίας. (p. 766. Athan. Oper. i.)

† The writings of Arius and his followers were condemned to be burned. If we are to believe Sozomen (which, I confess, that I am disinclined to do), the concealment of such heretical works was made a capital offence! E. H. Lib. i. c. 21.

awing the contending factions into that unity, which he declared to be the dearest wish of his heart, by his own sudden change of conduct, was the signal for the revival of the fiercest contentions. The Christian community was now to pay a heavy penalty for the pride and triumph with which they had hailed the interference of the Emperor in their religious questions. The imperial decisions had been admitted by the dominant party, when on their own side, to add weight to the decree of the council: at least they had applauded the sentence of banishment pronounced by the civil power against their antagonists; that authority now assumed a different tone, and was almost warranted, by their own admission, in expecting the same prompt obedience. The power which had exiled, might restore the heretic to his place and station. Court influence, however obtained through court intrigue, or from the caprice of the ruling sovereign, by this fatal, perhaps inevitable step, became the arbiter of the most vital questions of Christian faith and discipline; and thus the first precedent of a temporal punishment for an ecclesiastical offence was a dark prognostic, and an example, of the difficulties which would arise during the whole history of Christianity, when the communities, so distinctly two when they were separate and adverse, became one by the identification of the church and the state. The restoration of a banished man to the privileges of a citizen by the civil power, seemed to command his restoration to religious privileges by the ecclesiastical authority.*

Change in the opinions of Constantine.

A. D. 326. 336.

* Socr. i. 25, 26. Soz. ii. 27.

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The Arian party gradually grew into favour. A presbyter of Arian sentiments had obtained complete command over the mind of Constantia, the sister of Constantine. On her dying bed she entreated him to reconsider the justice of the sentence against that innocent, as she declared, and misrepresented man. Arius could not believe the sudden reverse of fortune; and not till he received a pressing letter from Constantine himself, did he venture to leave his place of exile. A person of still greater importance was at the same time reinstated in the imperial favour. Among the adherents of the Arian form, perhaps the most important was Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia. A dangerous suspicion that he had been too closely connected with the interests of Licinius during the recent struggle for empire, had alienated the mind of Constantine, and deprived Eusebius of that respectful attention which he might have commanded by his station, ability, and experience. With Theognis, Bishop of Nice, his faithful adherent in opinion and in fortune, he had been sent into exile; it is remarkable that the prelates of these two sees, the most important in that part of Asia, should have concurred in these views. The exiled prelates, in their petition for reinstatement in their dioceses, declared (and, notwithstanding the charge of falsehood which their opponents to the present day do not scruple to make, would they have ventured in a public document addressed to Constantine to misstate a fact so notorious?) they solemnly protested that they had not refused their signatures to the Nicene creed, but only to the anathema pronounced

Eusebius of Nicomedia.

A. D. 327.

against Arius and his followers. "Their obstinacy arose not from want of faith, but from excess of charity." They returned in triumph to their dioceses, and ejected the bishops who had been appointed in their place. No resistance appears to have been made. But the Arians were not content with their peaceable re-establishment in their former station. However they might attempt to harmonise their doctrines with the belief of their adversaries, by their vindictive aggression on the opposite party, they belied their pretensions to moderation and the love of peace. Eusebius, whom Constantine had before publicly denounced in no measured terms, grew rapidly into favour. The complete dominion, which from this time he appears to have exercised over the mind of Constantine, confirms the natural suspicion that the opinions of the Emperor were by no means formed by his own independent judgment, but entirely governed by the Christian teacher who might obtain his favour. Eusebius seems to have succeeded to the influence exercised with so much wisdom and temper by Hosius of Cordova. He became Bishop of Constantinople, and was the companion of Constantine in his visits to Jerusalem*; and the high estimation in which the Emperor held Eusebius of Cæsarea, according to the statements made, and the documents ostentatiously preserved by that writer in his ecclesiastical history, could not but contribute to the growing ascendancy of Arianism. They were in possession of some of the most important dio-

* Theodoret. i. 2.

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ceses in Asia; they were ambitious of establishing their supremacy in Antioch.

A. D. 328. Conduct of the Arian prelates in Antioch.

The suspicious brevity with which Eusebius glides over the early part of this transaction, which his personal vanity could not allow him to omit, confirms the statement of their adversaries, as to the unjustifiable means employed by the Arians to attain this object. Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis passed through Antioch on their way to Jerusalem. On their return, they summoned Eustathius, the Bishop of Antioch, whose character had hitherto been blameless, to answer before a hastily assembled council of bishops, on two distinct charges of immorality and heresy. The unseemly practice of bringing forward women of disreputable character to charge men of high station in the church with incontinency, formerly employed by the Heathens to calumniate the Christians, was now adopted by the reckless hostility of Christian faction. The accusation of a prostitute against Eustathius, of having been the father of her child, is said afterwards to have been completely disproved. The heresy with which Eustathius was charged, was that of Sabellianism, the usual imputation of the Arians against the Trinitarians of the opposite creed. Two Arian bishops having occupied the see of Antioch, but for a very short time, an attempt was made to remove Eusebius of Cæsarea to that diocese, no doubt by the high reputation of his talents, to overawe or to conciliate the Eustathian party. Eusebius, with the flattering approbation of the Emperor, declined the dangerous

post. Eustathius was deposed, and banished, by the imperial edict, to Thrace; but the attachment, at least of a large part, of the Christian population of Antioch refused to acknowledge the authority of the tribunal, or the justice of the sentence. The city was divided into two fierce and hostile factions — they were on the verge of civil war—and Antioch, where the Christians had first formed themselves into a separate community, but for the vigorous interference of the civil power, and the timely appearance of an imperial commissioner, might have witnessed the first blood shed, at least in the East, in a Christian quarrel.

It is impossible to calculate how far the authority and influence of the Syrian bishops, with the avowed countenance of the Emperor (for Constantius, the son of Constantine, was an adherent of the Arian opinions), might have subdued the zeal of the orthodox party. It is possible that, but for the rise of one inflexible and indomitable antagonist, the question might either have sunk to rest, or the Christian world acquiesced, at least the East, in a vague and mitigated Arianism.

Athanasius had been raised by the discernment of Alexander to a station of confidence and dignity. He had filled the office of secretary to the Alexandrian prelate. In the Council of Nice he had borne a distinguished part, and his zeal and talents designated him at once as the head of the Trinitarian party. On the death of Alexander, the universal voice of the predominant anti-Arians demanded the elevation of Athanasius. In vain

Athanasius

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he attempted to conceal himself, and to escape the dangerous honour. At thirty years of age, Athanasius was placed on the episcopal throne of the see, which ranked with Antioch, and afterwards with Constantinople, as the most important spiritual charge in the East.*

A. D. 326.

The imperial mandate was issued to receive Arius and his followers within the pale of the Christian communion.† But Constantine found, to his astonishment, that an imperial edict, which would have been obeyed in trembling submission from one end of the Roman empire to the other, even if it had enacted a complete political revolution, or endangered the property and privileges of thousands, was received with deliberate and steady disregard by a single Christian bishop. During two reigns, Athanasius contested the authority of the Emperor. He endured persecution, calumny, exile; his life was frequently endangered in defence of one single tenet, and that, it may be permitted to say, the most purely intellectual, and apparently the most remote from the ordinary passions of man: he confronted martyrdom, not for the broad and palpable distinction between Christianity and Heathenism‡, but for fine and subtle expressions of the Christian creed.§ He began and continued

Charges against Athanasius.

* The Arians asserted this election to have been carried by the irregular violence of a few bishops, contrary to the declared suffrages of the majority.

† Athanas. Apol. contra Ar. Soz. ii. 22.

§ I am not persuaded, either by the powerful eloquence of Athanasius himself, or by his able modern apologist, Möhler, that the opinions, at least of the Syrian semi-Arians, were so utterly irreconcileable with the orthodoxy of Athanasius, or likely to produce such fatal consequences to the

the contest not for the toleration, but for the supremacy of his own opinions.

Neither party, in truth, could now yield without the humiliating acknowledgment that all their contest had been on unimportant and unessential points. The passions and the interests, as well as the conscience, were committed in the strife. The severe and uncompromising temper of Athanasius, no doubt, gave some advantage to his jealous and watchful antagonists. Criminal charges began to multiply against a prelate who was thus fallen in the imperial favour.* They were assiduously instilled into the ears of Constantine; yet the extreme frivolousness of some of these accusations, and the triumphant refutation of the more material charges, before a tribunal of his enemies, establish, undeniably, the unblemished virtue of Athanasius.† He was charged with taxing the city to provide

general system of Christianity as are extorted from them by the keen theological precision of Athanasius.

* Theodoret mentions one of these customary charges of licentiousness, in which a woman of bad character accused Athanasius of violating her chastity. Athanasius was silent, while one of his friends, with assumed indignation demanded, "Do you accuse *me* of this crime?" "Yes," replied the woman, supposing him to be Athanasius, of whom she was ignorant, "*you* were the violator of my chastity." L. i. c. 30.

† It is remarkable, how little stress is laid on the persecutions which Athanasius is accused of having carried on through the civil authority. Accusatus præterea est de injuriis, violentiâ, cæde, atque ipsâ episcoporum internecione. Quique etiam diebus sacratissimis paschæ tyrannico more sæviens, Ducibus atque Comitibus junctus: quique propter ipsam aliquos in custodiâ recludebant, aliquos vero verberibus flagellisque vexabant, cæteros diversis tormentis ad communionem ejus sacrilegam adigebant. These charges neither seem to have been pressed nor refuted, as half so important as the act of sacrilege. See the protest of the Arian bishops at Sardica, in Hilarii Oper. Hist. Fragm. iii. c. 6. See also the accusations of violence on his return to Alexandria. Ibid. 8.

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linen vestments for the clergy; and with treasonable correspondence with an enemy of the Emperor. Upon this accusation he was summoned to Nicomedia, and acquitted by the Emperor himself. He was charged, as having authorised the profanation of the holy vessels, and the sacred books, in a church in the Mareotis, a part of his diocese. A certain Ischyras had assumed the office of presbyter, without ordination. Macarius, who was sent by Athanasius to prohibit his officiating in his usurped dignity, was accused by Ischyras of overthrowing the altar, breaking the cup, and burning the Scriptures. It is not impossible that the indiscreet zeal of an inferior may have thought it right to destroy sacred vessels thus profaned by unhallowed hands. But from Athanasius himself the charge recoiled without the least injury. But a darker charge remained behind, comprehending two crimes, probably in those days looked upon with equal abhorrence — magic and murder. The enemies of Athanasius produced a human hand said to be that of Arsenius, a bishop attached to the Meletian heresy, who had disappeared from Egypt, in a suspicious manner. The hand of the murdered bishop had been kept by Athanasius for unhallowed purposes of witchcraft. In vain the emissaries of Athanasius sought for Arsenius in Egypt, though he was known to be concealed in that country; but the superior and one of the monks of a monastery were seized, and compelled to confess that he was still living, and had lain hid in their sanctuary. Yet the charge was not abandoned: it impended

for more than two years over the head of Athanasius. A council, chiefly formed of the enemies of Athanasius, was summoned at Tyre. It was intimated to the Alexandrian prelate, that, if he refused to appear before the tribunal, he would be brought by force. Athanasius stood before the tribunal. He was arraigned on this charge; the hand was produced. To the astonishment of the court, Athanasius calmly demanded whether those present were acquainted with the person of Arsenius? He had been well known to many. A man was suddenly brought into the court, with his whole person folded in his mantle. Athanasius uncovered the head of the witness. He was at once recognised as the murdered Arsenius. Still the severed hand lay before them, and the adversaries of Athanasius expected to convict him of having mutilated the victim of his jealousy. Athanasius lifted up the mantle on one side, and showed the right hand; he lifted up the other, and showed the left. In a calm tone of sarcasm he observed, that the Creator had bestowed two hands on man; it was for his enemies to explain how Arsenius had possessed a third.* A fortunate accident had brought Arsenius to Tyre; he had been discovered by the friends of Athanasius. Though he denied his name, he was known by the bishop of Tyre; and this dramatic scene had been arranged as the most effective means of exposing the malice of the prelate's enemies. His discomfited accusers fled in the confusion.

Synod of Tyre. A. D. 335.

* Theodoret. i. 30.

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The implacable enemies of Athanasius were constrained to fall back upon the other exploded charge, the profanation of the sacred vessels by Macarius. A commission of inquiry had been issued, who conducted themselves, according to the statement of the friends of Athanasius, with the utmost violence and partiality. On their report, the bishop of the important city of Alexandria was deposed from his dignity. But Athanasius bowed not beneath the storm. He appears to have been a master in what may be called, without disrepect, theatrical effect. As the Emperor rode through the city of Constantinople, he was arrested by the sudden appearance of a train of ecclesiastics, in the midst of which was Athanasius. The offended Emperor, with a look of silent contempt, urged his horse onward. "God," said the prelate, with a loud voice, "shall judge between thee and me, since you thus espouse the cause of my calumniators. I demand only that my enemies be summoned and my cause heard in the imperial presence." The Emperor admitted the justice of his petition; the accusers of Athanasius were commanded to appear in Constantinople. Six of them, including the two Eusebii, obeyed the mandate. But a new charge, on a subject skilfully chosen to awaken the jealousy of the Emperor, counteracted the influence which might have been obtained by the eloquence or the guiltlessness of Athanasius. It is remarkable, that an accusation of a very similar nature should have caused the capital punishment of the most distinguished among the Heathen philosophic party, and

Athanasius in Constantinople.

New accusations.

the exile of the most eminent Christian prelate. Constantinople entirely depended for the supply of corn upon foreign importation. One half of Africa, including Egypt, was assigned to the maintenance of the new capital, while the Western division alone remained for Rome. At some period during the later years of Constantine, the adverse winds detained the Alexandrian fleet, and famine began to afflict the inhabitants of the city. The populace was in tumult; the government looked anxiously for means to allay the dangerous ferment. The Christian party had seen with jealousy and alarm the influence which a Heathen philosopher, named Sopater, had obtained over the mind of Constantine.* Sopater was a native of Apamea, the scholar of Iamblichus. The Emperor took great delight in his society, and was thus in danger of being perverted, if not to Heathenism, to that high Platonic indifferentism, which would leave the two religions on terms of perfect equality. He was seen seated on public occasions by the Emperor's side, and boasted, it was said, that the dissolution of Heathenism would be arrested by his authority. During the famine the Emperor entered the theatre; instead of the usual acclamations, he was received with a dull and melancholy

Death of Sopater the philosopher.

* Zosimus, ii. 40.; Sozom. 1—5.; Eunap. in Ædes. p. 21—25.; edit. Boissonade. Suidas, voc. Σώπατρος. If we are to believe Eunapius, the Christians might reasonably take alarm at the intimacy of Constantine with Sopater: ὁ μεν βασιλεὺς ἐαλώκει τε ὑπ' αὐτῷ καὶ δημοσίᾳ σύνεδρον εἶχεν, εἰς τὸν δεξιὸν καθίζων τοπὸν· ὃ καὶ ακοῦσαι καὶ ἰδεῖν ἄπιστον· οἱ δὲ παραδυναστεύοντες (*the Christians*, a remarkable admission of their influence,) ῥηγνύμενοι τῷ φθόνῳ πρὸς βασιλείαν ἄρτι φιλοσοφεῖν μετὰμανθάνουσαν. p. 21.

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silence. The enemies of Sopater seized the opportunity of accusing the philosopher of magic: his unlawful arts had bound the winds in the adverse quarter. If the Emperor did not, the populace would readily, believe him to be the cause of all their calamities. He was sacrificed to the popularity of the Emperor; the order for his decapitation was hastily issued, and promptly executed.

In the same spirit which caused the death of the Heathen philosopher, Athanasius was accused of threatening to force the Emperor to his own measures, by stopping the supplies of corn from the port of Alexandria. Constantine listened with jealous credulity to the charge. The danger of leaving the power of starving the capital in the hands of one who might become hostile to the government, touched the pride of the Emperor in the tenderest point. Athanasius was banished to the remote city of Treves.

A. D. 336. February. Banishment of Athanasius to Treves.

But neither the exile of Athanasius, nor the unqualified—his enemies of course asserted insincere or hypocritical – acceptance of the Nicene creed by Arius himself, allayed the differences. His presence in Alexandria had been the cause of new dissensions. He was recalled to Constantinople, where a council had been held, in which the Arian party maintained and abused their predominance. But Alexander, the Bishop of Constantinople, still firmly resisted the reception of Arius into the orthodox communion. Affairs were hastening to a crisis. The Arians, with the authority of the Emperor on their side, threatened to force their way

Arius in Constantinople.

into the church, and to compel the admission of their champion. The Catholics, the weaker party, had recourse to prayer; the Arians already raised the voice of triumph. While Alexander was prostrate at the altar, Arius was borne through the wondering city in a kind of ovation, surrounded by his friends, and welcomed with loud acclamations by his own party. As he passed the porphyry column, he was forced to retire into a house to relieve his natural wants. His return was anxiously expected, but in vain; he was found dead, as his antagonists declared, his bowels had burst out, and relieved the church from the presence of the obstinate heretic. We cannot wonder that, at such a period of excitement, the Catholics, in that well-timed incident, recognised a direct providential interference in their favour. It was ascribed to the prevailing prayers of Alexander and his clergy. Under the specious pretext of a thanksgiving for the deliverance of the church from the imminent peril of external violence, the Bishop prepared a solemn service. Athanasius, in a public epistle, alludes to the fate of Judas, which had befallen the traitor to the coequal dignity of the Son. His hollow charity ill disguises his secret triumph.*

Death of Arius.

Whatever effect the death of Arius might produce upon the mind of Constantine, it caused no mitigation in his unfavourable opinion of Athana-

* It was a standing argument of Athanasius, that the death of Arius was a sufficient refutation of his heresy.

Εἰς γὰρ τελείαν κατάγνωσιν τῆς αἱρέσεως τῶν Ἀρειανῶν, αὐτάρκης ἦ περὶ τοῦ θανάτου Ἀρείου γενομένη παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου κρίσις. Ded. Epist. ad Monachos, 3. Op. v. i. 344.

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sius. He contemptuously rejected the petitions which were sent from Alexandria to solicit his reinstatement; he refused to recall that "proud, turbulent, obstinate, and intractable" prelate. It was not till his death bed, that his consent was hardly extorted for this act of mercy, or rather of justice.

Baptism of Constantine.

The Baptism of Constantine on his death bed is one of those questions which has involved ecclesiastical historians in inextricable embarrassment. The fact is indisputable, it rests on the united authority of the Greek and Latin writers. Though he had so openly espoused the cause of Christianity, though he had involved himself so deeply in the interests of the Christian community, attended on their worship, presided, or at least sanctioned their councils with his presence, and had been constantly surrounded by the Christian clergy, the Emperor had still deferred till the very close of his life, his formal reception into the Christian church, the ablution of his sins, the admission to the privileges and hopes of the Christian, by that indispensable rite of Baptism.* There seems but one plain so-

* Mosheim's observations on the Christianity of Constantine are characterised by his usual good sense and judgment. De rebus Christ. antè Const. Magnum. p. 965. I extract only a few sentences. Erat primis post victum Maxentium annis in animo ejus cum omnis religionis, tum Christianæ imprimis, parum sana et propius à Græcorum et Romanorum opinione remota notio. Nescius enim salutis et beneficiorum à Christo humano generi partorum, Christum Deum esse putabat, qui cultorum suorum fidem et diligentiam felicitate hujus vitæ, rebusque secundis comparare, hostes vero et contemptores mox pœnis, malisque omnis generis afficere potuit. * * * Ita sensim de vera religionis Christianæ indole * * edoctus stultitiam et deformitatem antiquarum superstitionum clarius perspiciebat, et Christo uni sincere nomen dabat. p. 977, 978.

lution of this difficulty. The Emperor constantly maintained a kind of superiority over the Christian part of his subjects. It was still rather the lofty and impartial condescension of a protector, than the spiritual equality of the proselyte. He still asserted, and in many cases exercised, the privilege of that high indifferentism, which ruled his conduct by his own will or judgment, rather than by the precepts of a severe and definite religion. He was reluctant, though generally convinced of the truth, and disposed to recognise the superiority of the Christian religion, to commit himself by the irrevocable act of initiation. He may have been still more unwilling to sever himself entirely from the Heathen majority of his subjects, lest by such a step, in some sudden yet always possible crisis, he might shake their allegiance. In short he would not surrender any part of his dignity, as Emperor of the world; especially as he might suppose that, even if necessary to his salvation as a Christian, he could command at any time the advantages of baptism. On the other hand, the Christians, then far more pliant than when their undisputed authority ruled the minds of monarchs with absolute sway, hardly emerged from persecution, struggling for a still contested supremacy, divided among themselves, and each section courting the favour of the Emperor, were glad to obtain an imperial convert on his own terms. In constant hope that the Emperor himself would take this decisive step, they were too prudent or too cautious to urge it with imperious or unnecessary vehemence. He was not so en-

A. D. 337.

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tirely their own, but that he might still be estranged by indiscretion or intemperance; he would gradually become more enlightened, and they were content to wait in humble patience till that Providence who had raised up this powerful protector, should render him fully, and exclusively, and openly, their own.

Extent to which Paganism was suppressed.

If it be difficult to determine the extent to which Constantine proceeded in the establishment of Christianity, it is even more perplexing to estimate how far he exerted the imperial authority in the abolition of Paganism. Conflicting evidence encounters us at every point. Eusebius, in three distinct passages in his "Life of Constantine," asserts that he prohibited sacrifice*; that he issued two laws to prohibit, both in the city and in the country, the pollutions of the old idolatry, the setting up of statues, divinations, and other unlawful practices; and to command the total abolition of sacrifice†; that throughout the Roman empire, the "doors of idolatry" were closed to the people and to the army, and every kind of sacrifice was prohibited.‡ Theodoret asserts§ that Constantine prohibited sacrifice, and, though he did not destroy, shut up all the temples. In a passage of his Panegyric‖, Eusebius asserts, that he sent two officers into every

* Θύειν ἀπείρητο, ii. 44.

† Δύο κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ἐπέμποντο νόμοι· ὁ μὲν εἴργων τὰ μυσαρὰ τῆς κατὰ πόλεις καὶ χώρας τὸ παλαιὸν συντελουμένης εἰδωλολατρίας, ὡς μήτε ἐγέρσεις ξοάνων ποιεῖσθαι τολμᾷν, μήτε μαντείαις καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις περιεργίαις ἐπιχειρεῖν, μήτε μὴν θύειν καθόλου μηδένα. ii. 45.

‡ Καθόλου, δε τοῖς ὑπὸ τῇ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ δήμοις τε καὶ στρατιωτικοῖς, πύλαι ἀπεκλείοντο εἰδωλολατρίας, θυσίας τε τρόπος ἀπηγορεύετο πᾶς. iv. 23. διεκωλύετο μὲν θύειν εἰδώλοις. ibid. 25. δήμοις may mean the magistracy, the public ceremonial.

§ Theodoret, vi. 21. Compare Sozomen, iii. 17.; Orosius, vii. 28.

‖ De Laudib. Constant. i. 8.

part of the empire, who forced the priests to surrender up the statues of their gods, which, having been despoiled of their ornaments, were melted or destroyed. These strong assertions of Eusebius are, to a certain extent, confirmed by expressions in the laws of his successors, especially one of Constans, which appeals to an edict of his father Constantine, which prohibited sacrifice.*

On the other hand, Eusebius himself inserts, and ascribes to a date posterior to some of these laws, documents, which he professes to have seen in Constantine's own hand, proclaiming the most impartial toleration to the Pagans, and deprecating compulsion in religious matters. "Let all enjoy the same peace; let no one disturb another in his religious worship; let each act as he thinks fit; let those who withhold their obedience from Thee (it is an address to the Deity), have their temples of falsehood if they think right."† He exhorts to mutual charity, and declares, "It is a very different thing willingly to submit to trials for the sake of immortal life, and to force others by penalties to embrace one faith."‡ These generous sentiments, if Constantine was issuing edicts to close the temples, and prohi-

* Cesset superstitio, sacrificiorum aboleatur insania. Nam quicunque contra legem divi Principis, parentis nostri, et hanc nostræ mansuetudinis jussionem ausus fuerit sacrificia celebrare, competens in eum vindicta, et præsens sententia exseratur. Cod. Theodos. xvi. 10. 2. See likewise the note of Godefroy.

† Ὁμοίαν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν οἱ πλανώμενοι χαίροντες λαμβανέτωσαν εἰρήνης τε καὶ ἡσυχίας ἀπόλαυσιν * * Μηδεὶς τὸν ἕτερον παρενοχλείτω· ἕκαστος ὅπερ ἡ ψυχὴ βούλεται τοῦτο καὶ πραττέτω * * Οἱ δ' ἑαυτοὺς ἀφέλκοντες, ἐχόντων βουλόμενοι τὰ τῆς ψευδολογίας τεμένη. Vit. Const. ii. 26.

‡ Ἄλλο γάρ ἐστι, τὸν ὑπὲρ ἀθανασίας ἄθλον ἑκουσίως ἐπαναιρεῖσθαι, ἄλλο τὸ μετὰ τιμωρίας ἐπαναγκάζειν. c. 60.

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biting the sacred rites of his Pagan subjects, had been the grossest hypocrisy. The laws against the soothsayers spoke, as was before shown, the same tolerant language with regard to the public ceremony of the religion.* Can the victory over Licinius so entirely have changed the policy of Constantine, as to induce him to prohibit altogether, rites which but a few years before he had sanctioned by his authority?

The Pagan writers, who are not scrupulous in their charges against the memory of Constantine, and dwell with bitter resentment on all his overt acts of hostility to the ancient religion, do not accuse him of these direct encroachments on Paganism. Neither Julian nor Zosimus lay this to his charge. Libanius distinctly asserts that the temples were left open and undisturbed during his reign, and that Paganism remained unchanged.†

All historical records strongly confirm the opinion, that Paganism was openly professed; its temples restored‡; its rites celebrated; neither was its priesthood degraded from their immunities, nor the estates belonging to the temples generally

* Qui vero id vobis existimatis conducere, adite aras publicas atque delubra et consuetudinis vestræ celebrate solemnia; nec enim prohibemus præteritæ usurpationis officia libera luce tractari. Cod. Theodos. xvi. 10.

† Τῆς κατὰ νόμον δὲ θεραπείας ἐκίνησεν οὐδὲ ἕν. Pro Templis, vol. ii. p. 162.

Libanus adds that Constantius, on a certain change of circumstances, *first* prohibited sacrifice. Compare also Orat. 26. Julian Orat. vii. p. 424.

‡ See, in Grutcr, p. 100. n. 6., the inscription on the restoration of the Temple of Concord, during the consulship of Paulinus (A. C. 331, 332.), by the authority of the præfect of the city, and S. P. Q. R. Altars were erected to other Pagan gods. Compare Beugnot, i. 106.

M. Beugnot, in his Destruction du Paganisme en Occident, has collected with great industry the proofs of this fact, from inscriptions, medals, and other of the more minute contemporary memorials.

alienated; in short, that it was the public religion of a great part of the empire; and still confronted Christianity, if not on equal terms, still with pertinacious resistance, down to the reign of Theodosius, and even that of his sons. Constantine himself, though he neither offered sacrifices, nor consulted the Sibylline books, nor would go up to the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter with the senate and the people, performed, nevertheless, some of the functions, at least did not disdain the appellation, of Supreme Pontiff.*

Perhaps we may safely adopt the following conclusions. There were two kinds of sacrifices abolished by Constantine. I. The private sacrifices, connected with unlawful acts of theurgy and of magic; those midnight offerings to the powers of darkness, which, in themselves, were illegal, and led to scenes of unhallowed licence.† II. Those which might be considered the state sacrifices offered by the Emperor himself, or by his representatives in his name, either in the cities or in the army. Though Constantine advanced many Christians to offices of trust, and no doubt

* There is a medal extant of Constantine as Supreme Pontiff.

† See the laws relating to divination, above, p. 359.

M. la Bastie and M. Beugnot, would consider the terms τὰ μυσαρὰ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας, in the rescript of Constantine, and the "insana superstitio" of the law of Constans, to refer exclusively to these nocturnal and forbidden sacrifices. M. Beugnot has observed, that Constantine always uses respectful and courteous language concerning Paganism. Vetus observantia, vetus consuetudo; templorum solemnia; consuetudinis gentilitiæ solemnitas. The laws of the later emperors employ very different terms. Error; dementia; error veterum; profanus ritus; sacrilegus ritus; nefarius ritus; superstitio Pagana, damnabilis, damnata, deterrima, impia; funestæ superstitionis errores; stolidus Paganorum error. Cod. Theodos. t. v. p. 255. Beugnot, tom i. p. 80.

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many who were ambitious of such offices conformed to the religion of the Emperor, probably most of the high dignities of the state were held by Pagans. An edict might be required to induce them to depart from the customary usage of sacrifice, which with the Christian officers would quietly fall into desuetude.* But still, the sacrifices made by the priesthood, at the expense of the sacerdotal establishments, and out of their own estates—though in some instances these estates were seized by Constantine, and the sacerdotal colleges reduced to poverty — and the *public* sacrifices, offered by the piety of distinguished individuals, would be made as usual. In the capital there can be little doubt that sacrifices were offered, in the name of the senate and people of Rome, till a much later period.

Legal establishment of Christianity.

Christianity may now be said to have ascended the imperial throne: with the single exception of Julian, from this period the monarchs of the Roman empire professed the religion of the Gospel. This important crisis in the history of Christianity almost forcibly arrests the attention to contemplate the change wrought in Christianity by its advancement into a dominant power in the state; and the change in the condition of mankind up to this period, attributable to the direct authority or indirect influence of the new religion. By ceasing to exist as a separate community, and by advancing its pretensions to influence the general government of mankind, Christianity, to a certain extent, forfeited

Effects of this on the religion.

* The prohibition to the δήμοι above from Eusebius) refer, I and στρατιωτικοὶ (see quotation conceive, to these.

its independence. It could not but submit to these laws, framed, as it might seem, with its own concurrent voice. It was no longer a republic, governed exclusively— as far at least as its religious concerns — by its own internal polity. The interference of the civil power in some of its most private affairs, the promulgation of its canons, and even in some cases the election of its bishops by the state, was the price which it must inevitably pay for its association with the ruling power. The natural satisfaction, the more than pardonable triumph, in seeing the Emperor of the world a suppliant with themselves at the foot of the cross, would blind the Christian world, in general, to these consequences of their more exalted position. The more ardent and unworldly would fondly suppose that a Christian emperor would always be actuated by Christian motives; and the imperial authority, instead of making aggressions on Christian independence, would rather bow in humble submission to its acknowledged dominion. His main object would be, to develope the energies of the new religion in the amplest freedom, and allow them free scope in the subjugation of the world.

On the civil power.

The Emperor as little anticipated that he was introducing as an antagonist power, an inextinguishable principle of liberty into the administration of human affairs. This liberty was based on deeper foundations than the hereditary freedom of the ancient republics. It appealed to a tribunal higher than any which could exist upon earth. This antagonist principle of independence, however, at times apparently crushed, and submitting to volun-

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tary slavery, or even lending itself to be the instrument of arbitrary despotism, was inherent in the new religion, and would not cease till it had asserted and, for a considerable period, exercised an authority superior to that of the civil government. Already in Athanasius might be seen the one subject of Constantine who dared to resist his will. From Athanasius, who submitted, but with inflexible adherence to his own opinions, to Ambrose, who rebuked the great Theodosius, and from Ambrose up to the Pope who set his foot on the neck of the prostrate Emperor, the progress was slow, but natural and certain. In this profound prostration of the human mind, and the total extinction of the old sentiments of Roman liberty, in the adumbration of the world, by what assumed the pomp and the language of an Asiatic despotism, it is impossible to calculate the latent as well as open effect of this moral resistance. In Constantinople, indeed, and in the East, the clergy never obtained sufficient power to be formidable to the civil authority; their feuds too often brought them in a sort of moral servitude to the foot of the throne; still the Christian, and the Christian alone, throughout this long period of human degradation breathed a kind of atmosphere of moral freedom, which raised him above the general level of servile debasement.

How far the religion of the empire.

During the reign of Constantine, Christianity had made a rapid advance, no doubt, in the number of its proselytes, as well as in its external position. It was not yet the established religion of the empire. It did not as yet stand forward as the new religion

adapted to the new order of things, as a part of the great simultaneous change, which gave to the Roman world a new capital, a new system of government, and, in some important instances, a new jurisprudence. Yet having sprung up at once, under the royal favour, to a perfect equality with the prevailing Heathenism, the mere manifestation of that favour, where the antagonist religion hung so loose upon the minds of men, gave it much of the power and authority of a dominant faith. The religion of the Emperor would soon become that of the court; and, by somewhat slower degrees, that of the empire. At present, however, as we have seen, little open aggression took place upon Paganism. The few temples which were closed were insulated cases, and condemned as offensive to public morality. In general, the temples stood in all their former majesty; for as yet the ordinary process of decay, from neglect or supineness, could have produced little effect. The difference was, that the Christian churches began to assume a more stately and imposing form. In the new capital, they surpassed in grandeur, and probably in decoration, the Pagan temples, which belonged to old Byzantium. The immunities granted to the Christian clergy only placed them on the same level with the Pagan priesthood. The pontifical offices were still held by the distinguished men of the state: the Emperor himself was long the chief pontiff; but the religious office had become a kind of appendage to the temporal dignity. The Christian prelates were con-

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stantly admitted, in virtue of their office, to the imperial presence.

Effect of legal establishment of Christianity on society.

On the state of society at large, on its different forms and gradations, little impression had as yet been made by Christianity. The Christians were still a separate people; their literature was exclusively religious, and addressed, excepting in its apologies, or its published exhortations against Paganism, to the initiate alone. Its language would be unintelligible to those uninstructed in Christian theology. Yet the general legislation of Constantine, independent of those edicts which concerned the Christian community, bears some evidence of the silent underworking of Christian opinion. The rescript, indeed, for the religious observance of the Sunday, which enjoined the suspension of all public business and private labour, except that of agriculture, was enacted, according to the apparent terms of the decree, for the whole Roman empire. Yet, unless we had direct proof, that the decree set forth the Christian reason for the sanctity of the day, it may be doubted whether the act would not be received by the greater part of the empire, as merely adding one more festival to the fasti of the empire, as proceeding entirely from the will of the Emperor, or even grounded on his authority as Supreme Pontiff, by which he had the plenary power of appointing holy-days.* In fact, as we have before observed, the day of the Sun would be willingly hallowed by almost all the Pagan world,

Laws relating to Sundays.

* Cod. Theod. l. 2. tit. 8.; iii. 12.; Euseb. Vit. Const. 18, l. 8. tit. 8.; l. 5. tit. 3. Cod. Just. 19, 20.; Sozom. i. 8.

especially that part which had admitted any tendency towards the Oriental theology.

Laws tending to humanity.

Where the legislation of Constantine was of a humaner cast, it would be unjust not to admit the influence of Christian opinions, spreading even beyond the immediate circle of the Christian community, as at least a concurrent cause of the improvement. In one remarkable instance, there is direct authority that a certain measure was adopted by the advice of an influential Christian. During the period of anarchy and confusion which preceded the universal empire of Constantine, the misery had been so great, particularly in Africa and Italy, that the sale of infants for slaves, their exposure, and even infanticide, had become fearfully common. Constantine issued an edict, in which he declared that the Emperor should be considered the father of all such children. It was a cruelty, irreconcileable with the spirit of the times, to permit any subjects of the empire to perish of starvation, or to be reduced to any unworthy action by actual hunger. Funds were assigned for the food and clothing of such children as the parents should declare themselves unable to support, partly on the imperial revenues, partly on the revenues of the neighbouring cities. As this measure did not prevent the sale of children, parents were declared incapable of reclaiming children thus sold, unless they paid a reasonable price for their enfranchisement.* Children which had been exposed could not be reclaimed from

* Codex. Theodos. v. vii. 1. this time, compare Lactantius. On the exposure of children at D. I. ii. 20.

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those who had received them into their families, whether by adoption or as slaves. Whatever may have been the wisdom, the humanity of these ordinances is unquestionable. They are said to have been issued by the advice of Lactantius, to whom had been entrusted the education of Crispus, the son of Constantine.

Concerning slavery.

Child-stealing, for the purpose of selling them for slaves, was visited with a penalty, which both in its nature and barbarity retained the stamp of the old Roman manners. The criminal was condemned to the ampitheatre, either to be devoured by wild beasts or exhibited as a gladiator. Christianity had not as yet allayed the passion for these savage amusements of the Roman people; yet, in conjunction with the somewhat milder manners of the East, it excluded gladiatorial exhibitions from the new capital. The Grecian amusements of the theatre and of the chariot race satisfied the populace of Constantinople. Whatever might be the improved condition of the slaves within the Christian community, the tone of legislation preserves the same broad and distinct line of demarcation between the two classes of society. The master, indeed, was deprived of the arbitrary power of life and death. The death of a slave under torture, or any excessive severity of punishment, was punishable as homicide; but if he died under a *moderate* chastisement, the master was not responsible. In the distribution of the royal domains, care was to be taken not to divide the families of the prædial slaves. It is a cruelty, says the law, to separate

parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives.* But marriages of free women with slaves were punishable with death; the children of such unions were indeed free, but could not inherit their mothers' property. The person of dignity and station, who had children by a marriage contract with a woman of base condition, could not make a testament in their favour; even purchases made in their names or for their benefit, might be claimed by the legitimate heirs. The base condition comprehended not only slaves but freed women, actresses, tavern keepers, and their daughters, as well as those of courtezans or gladiators. Slaves who were concerned in the seduction of their masters' children were to be burned alive without distinction of sex. The barbarity of this punishment rather proves the savage manners of the time than the inferior condition of the slave; for the receivers of the royal domains who were convicted of depredation or fraud were condemned to the same penalty.†

Law against rape and abduction.

It can scarcely be doubted that the stricter moral tone of Constantine's legislation more or less remotely emanated from Christianity. The laws against rape and seduction were framed with so much rigour, as probably to make their general

* Cod. Theod.

† Manumission, which was performed under the sanction of a religious ceremonial in the Heathen temples, might now be performed in the church: the clergy might manumit their slaves, in the presence of the church. Cod. Theo. iv. 7. 1. This law must have connected Christianity in the general sentiment with the emancipation of slaves. Compare Sozomen, i. 9. who says, that Constantine issued three laws on the subject. The manumission took place publicly at Easter. Greg. Nyss.

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execution difficult, if not impracticable.* The ravisher had before escaped with impunity: if the injured party did not prosecute him for his crime, she had the right of demanding reparation by marriage. By the law of Constantine, the consent of the female made her an accomplice in the crime; she was amenable to the same penalty. What that penalty was is not quite clear, but it seems that the ravisher was exposed to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Even where the female had suffered forcible abduction, she had to acquit herself of all suspicion of consent, either from levity of manner, or want of proper vigilance. Those pests of society, the pandars, who abused the confidence of parents, and made a traffic of the virtue of their daughters, were in the same spirit condemned to a punishment so horrible, as, no doubt, more frequently to ensure their impunity: melted lead was to be poured down their throats. Parents who did not prosecute such offences were banished, and their property confiscated. It is not, however, so much the severity of the punishments, indicating a stronger abhorrence of the crime, as the social and moral evils of which it took cognisance, which shows the remoter workings of a sterner moral principle. A religion which requires of its followers a strict, as regards the Christianity of this period, it may be said an ascetic rigour, desires to enforce on the mass of mankind by the power of the law that which it cannot effect by the more legitimate and permanent means of moral in-

* Cod. Theod.

fluence. In a small community where the law is the echo of the public sentiment, or where it rests on an acknowledged divine authority, it may advance further into the province of morality, and extend its provisions into every relation of society. The Mosaic law, which, simultaneously with the Christian spirit, began to enter into the legislation of the Christian emperors, in its fearful penalties imposed upon the illicit commerce of the sexes, concurred with the rigorous jealousy of the Asiatic tribes of that region concerning the honour of their women. But when the laws of Constantine suddenly classed the crime of adultery with those of poison and assassination, and declared it a capital offence, it may be doubted whether any improvement ensued, or was likely to ensue, in the public morals. Unless Christianity had already greatly corrected the general licentiousness of the Roman world, not merely within but without its pale, it may safely be affirmed that the general and impartial execution of such a statute was impossible.* The severity of the law against the breach of conjugal fidelity was accompanied with strong restrictions upon the facility of divorce. Three crimes alone, in the husband, justified the wife in demanding a legal separation, — homicide, poisoning, or the violation of sepulchres. This latter crime was, apparently, very frequent, and looked upon with great abhorrence.† In these cases, the wife recovered

Law against adultery.

Concerning divorce.

* It may be admitted, as some evidence of the inefficiency of this law, that in the next reign the penalties were actually aggravated. The criminals were condemned either to be burned alive, or sewed up in a sack and cast into the sea.

† Codex. Theodos. iii. 16. 1.

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her dowry; if she separated for any other cause, she forfeited all to a single needle, and was liable to perpetual banishment.* The husband, in order to obtain a divorce, must convict his wife of poisoning, adultery, or keeping notoriously infamous company. In all other cases, he restored the whole of the dowry. If he married again, the former wife, thus illegally cast off, might claim his whole property, and even the dowry of the second wife. These impediments to the dissolution of the marriage tie, the facility of which experience and reason concur in denouncing as destructive of social virtue and of domestic happiness, with its penalties affecting the property rather than the person, were more likely to have a favourable and extensive operation than the sanguinary proscription of adultery. Marriage being a civil contract in the Roman world, the state had full right to regulate the stability and the terms of the compact. In other respects, in which the jurisprudence assumed a higher tone, Christianity, I should conceive, was far more influential through its religious persuasiveness, than by the rigour which it thus impressed upon the laws of the empire. That nameless crime, the universal disgrace of Greek and Roman society, was far more effectively repressed by the abhorrence infused into the public sentiment by the pure religion of the Gospel, than

Against pæderasty.

* The law of Constantine and Constans, which made intermarriage with a niece a capital crime, is supposed by Godefroy to have been a local act, directed against the laxity of Syrian morals in this respect. Cod. Theod. iii. 12. 1. The law issued at Rome, prohibiting intermarriage with the sister of a deceased wife, annulled the marriage, and bastardised the children. iii. 12. 2.

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by the penalty of death, enacted by statute against the offence. Another law of unquestionable humanity, and, probably, of more extensive operation, prohibited the making of eunuchs. The slave who had suffered this mutilation might at once claim his freedom.*

Making of eunuchs.

Laws favourable to celibacy.

Perhaps the greatest evidence of the secret aggression of Christianity, or rather, in our opinion, the foreign Asiatic principle which was now completely interwoven with Christianity, was the gradual relaxation of the laws unfavourable to celibacy. The Roman law had always proceeded on the principle of encouraging the multiplication of citizens, particularly in the higher orders, which, from various causes, especially the general licentiousness under the later republic and the early empire, were in danger of becoming extinct. The parent of many children was a public benefactor, the unmarried man a useless burden, if not a traitor, to the well-being of the state. The small establishment of the vestal virgins was evidently the remains of an older religion, inconsistent with the general sentiment and manners of Rome.

On this point the encroachment of Christianity was slow and difficult. The only public indication of its influence was the relaxation of the Papia-poppæan law. This statute enforced certain disabilities on those who were unmarried, or without children by their marriage, at the age of twenty-five. The former could only inherit from their

* All these laws will be found in the Theodosian Code, under the name of Constantine, at the commencement of each book.

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nearest relations; the latter obtained only the tenth of any inheritance which might devolve on their wives, the moiety of property devised to them by will. The forfeiture went to the public treasury, and was a considerable source of profit. Constantine attempted to harmonise the two conflicting principles. He removed the disqualifications on celibacy, but he left the statute in force against married persons who were without children. In more manifest deference to Christianity, he extended the privilege hitherto confined to the vestal virgins, of making their will, and that before the usual age appointed by the law, to all who had made a religious vow of celibacy.

Burial of Constantine.

Even after his death, both religions vied, as it were, for Constantine. He received with impartial favour the honours of both. The first Christian emperor was deified by the Pagans, in a later period he was worshipped as a saint by part of the Christian church. On the same medal appears his title of "God," with the monogram, the sacred symbol of Christianity; in another he is seated in the chariot of the Sun, in a car drawn by four horses, with a hand stretched forth from the clouds to raise him to Heaven.* But to show respect at once to the Emperor and to the Christian Apostle, contrary to the rigid usage,

* Inter Divos meruit referri; Eutrop. x. 8. Eckhel. doct. numm. viii. 92, 93. Bolland, 21st Maij. Compare Le Beau, Hist. du Bas Empire, i. p. 388. Beugnot, i. 109.

There exists a calendar in which the festivals of the new God are indicated. Acad. des Inscrip. xv. 106.

which forbade any burial to take place within the city, Constantine was interred in the porch of the church dedicated to the Apostles. Constantius did great honour (in Chrysostom's opinion) to his imperial father, by burying him in the Fisherman's Porch.*

Conversion of Æthiopia.

During the reign of Constantine, Christianity continued to advance beyond the borders of the Roman empire, and, in some degree, to indemnify herself for the losses which she sustained in the kingdom of Persia. The Ethiopians appear to have attained some degree of civilisation; a considerable part of the Arabian commerce was kept up with the other side of the Red Sea, through the port of Adulis; and Greek letters appear, from inscriptions recently discovered†, to have made considerable progress among this barbarous people. The Romans called this country, with that of the Homerites on the other side of the Arabian gulph, by the vague name of the nearer India. Travellers were by no means uncommon in these times, whether for purposes of trade, or, following the traditional history of the ancient sages, from the more disinterested desire of knowledge. Metrodorus, a philosopher, had extended his travels throughout this region ‡, and, on

* Chrysost. Hom. 60. in 2 Cor.

† That published by Mr. Salt, from the ruins of Axum, had already appeared in the work of Cosmas Indicopleustes, edited by Montfaucon; Niebuhr published another, discovered by Gau, in Nubia, relating to Silco, king of that country.

‡ The same Metrodorus afterwards made a journey into further India; his object was to visit the Brahmins, to examine their religious tenets and practices. Metrodorus instructed the Indians in the construction of water-mills and baths. In their gratitude, they opened to him the inmost sanctuary of their temples. But the virtue of the philosopher Metro-

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his return, the account of his adventures induced another person of the same class, Meropius of Tyre, to visit the same regions. Meropius was accompanied by two youths, Edesius and Frumentius. Meropius, with most of his followers, fell in a massacre, arising out of some sudden interruption of the peace between the Ethiopians and the Romans. Edesius and Frumentius were spared on account of their youth. They were taken into the service of the King, and gradually rose, till one became the royal cup-bearer; the other, the administrator of the royal finances. The King died soon after they had been elevated to these high distinctions, and bequeathed their liberty to the strangers. The queen entreated them to continue their valuable services till her son should attain to full age. The Romans complied with her request, and the supreme government of the kingdom of Ethiopia was adminis-

dorus, was not proof against the gorgeous treasures which dazzled his eyes; he stole a great quantity of pearls, and other jewels; others, he said that he had received as a present to Constantine from the King of India. He appeared in Constantinople. The Emperor received, with the highest satisfaction, those magnificent gifts which Metrodorus presented in his own name. But Metrodorus complained that his offerings would have been far more sumptuous if he had not been attacked on his way through Persia, contrary to the spirit of the existing peace between the empires, and plundered of great part of his treasures. Constantine, it is said, wrote an indignant remonstrance to the King of Persia. This story is curious, as it shows the connection kept up by traders and travellers with the further East, which accounts for the allusions to Indian tenets and usages in the Christian, as well as the Pagan, writers of the time. It rests on the late authority of Cedrenus (t. i. p. 295.), but is confirmed by a passage of Ammianus Marcellinus, who, however, places it in the reign of Constantine. Sed Constantium ardores Parthicos succendisse, cum Metrodori mendaciis avidius acquiescit, lxxv. c. 4. Compare St. Martin's additions to Le Beau, i. 343.

tered by these two Romans, but the chief post was occupied by Frumentius. Of the causes which disposed the mind of Frumentius towards Christianity we know nothing; he is represented as seized with an eager desire of becoming acquainted with its tenets, and anxiously inquiring whether any Christians existed in the country, or could be found among the Roman travellers who visited it.* It is more probable, since there were so many Jews, both on the Arabian and the African side of the gulf, that some earlier knowledge of Christianity had spread into these regions. But it was embraced with ardour by Frumentius; he built a church, and converted many of the people. When the young king came of age, nowithstanding the remonstrances of the prince and his mother, Frumentius and his companion returned to their native country. Frumentius passed through Alexandria, and having communicated to Athanasius the happy beginnings of the Gospel in that wild region, the influence of that commanding prelate induced him to accept the mission of the Apostle of India. He was consecrated Bishop of Axum by the Alexandrian prelate, and that see was always considered to owe allegiance to the patriarchate of Alexandria. The preaching of Frumentius was said to have been eminently successful, not merely among the Ethiopians, but the neighbouring tribes of Nubians and Blemmyes. His name is still reverenced as

* Sozomen, in his ignorance, has recourse to visions, or direct divine inspiration. Θείαις ἴσως προτραπεὶς ἐπιφανείαις, ἢ καὶ αὐτομάτως τοῦ Θεοῦ κινοῦντος.

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the first of the Ethiopian pontiffs. But probably in no country did Christianity so soon degenerate into a mere form of doctrine; the wild inhabitants of these regions sank downward rather than ascended in the scale of civilisation; and the fruits of Christianity, humanity, and knowledge, were stifled amid the conflicts of savage tribes, by ferocious manners, and less frequent intercourse with more cultivated nations.

Of the Iberians.

The conversion of the Iberians * was the work of a holy virgin. Nino was among the Armenian maidens who fled from the persecutions of the Persians, and found refuge among the warlike nation of Iberia, the modern Georgia. Her seclusion, her fasting, and constant prayers, excited the wonder of these fierce warriors. Two cures which she is said to have wrought, one on the wife of the king, still further directed the attention of the people to the marvellous stranger. The grateful queen became a convert to Christianity. Mihran, the king, still wavered between the awe of his ancient deities, the fear of his subjects, and his inclination to the new and wonder-working faith. One day when he was hunting in a thick and intricate wood, he was enveloped in a sudden and impenetrable mist. Alone, separated from his companions, his awe-struck mind thought of the Christians' God; he determined to embrace the Christian faith. On a sudden the mist cleared off, the light shone gloriously down, and in this natural image the king

* Socrates, i. 20.; Sozomen, ii. 24.; Moses Choren, Lib. ii. c. 83.; c. 7.; Rufin. x. 10.; Theodoret, i. Klaproth, Travels in Georgia.

beheld the confirmation of the light of truth spread abroad within his soul. After much opposition, the temple of the great god Aramazd (the Ormuzd of the Persian system) was levelled with the earth. A cross was erected upon its ruins by the triumphant Niṇo, which was long worshipped as the palladium of the kingdom.* Wonders attended on the construction of the first Christian church. An obstinate pillar refused to rise, and defied the utmost mechanical skill of the people to force it from its oblique and pendant position. The holy virgin passed the night in prayer. On the morning the pillar rose majestically of its own accord, and stood upright upon its pedestal. The wondering people burst into acclamations of praise to the Christians god, and generally embraced the faith. The king of Iberia entered into an alliance with Constantine, who sent him valuable presents, and a Christian bishop. Eustathius, it is said, the deposed patriarch of Antioch, undertook this mission by the command of the Emperor; and Iberia was thus secured to the Christian faith.

* In 1801 this cross, or that which perpetual tradition accounted as the identical cross, was removed to Petersburg by Prince Bagration. It was restored, to the great joy of the nation, by order of the Emperor Alexander.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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